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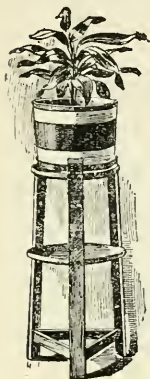
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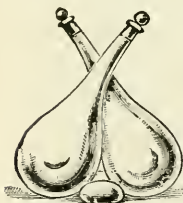
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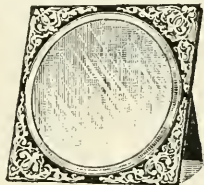
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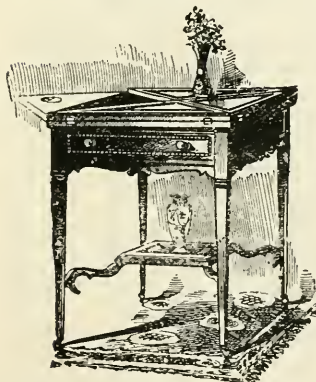
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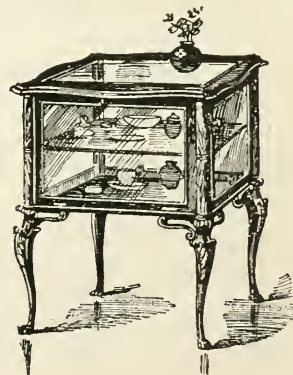
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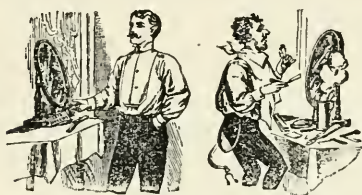
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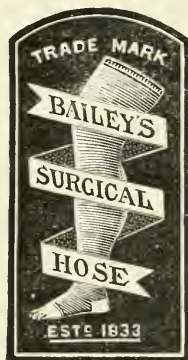
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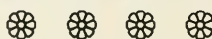
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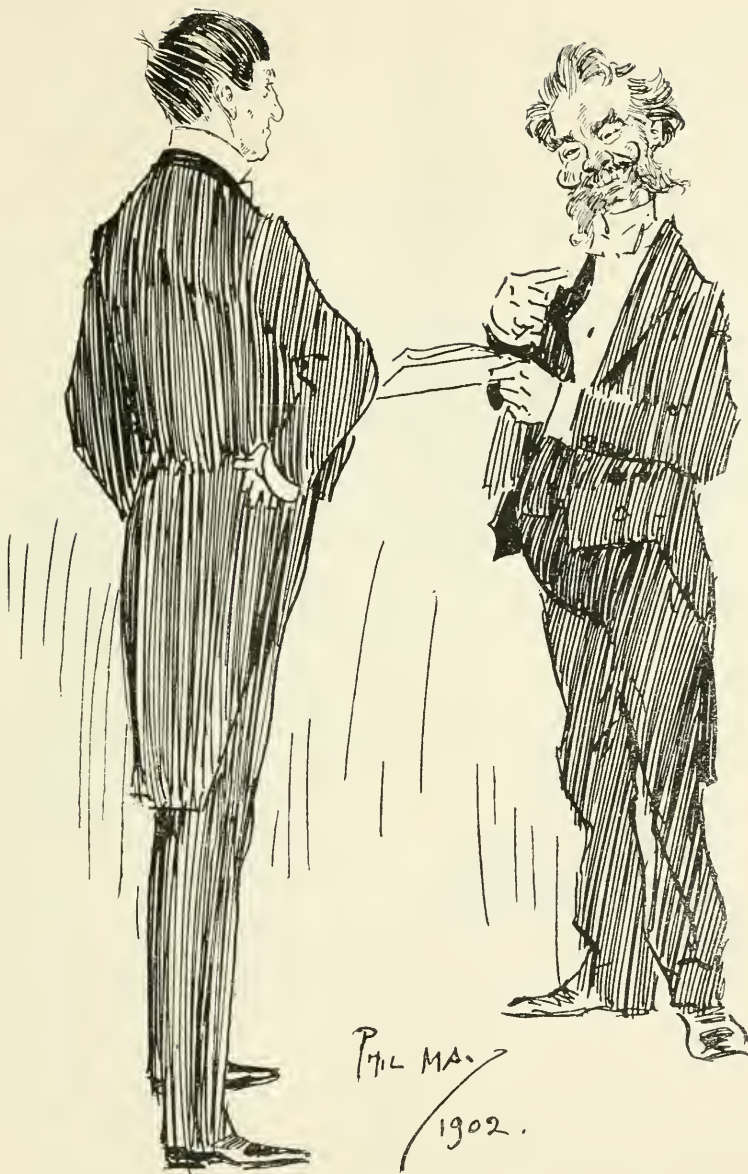
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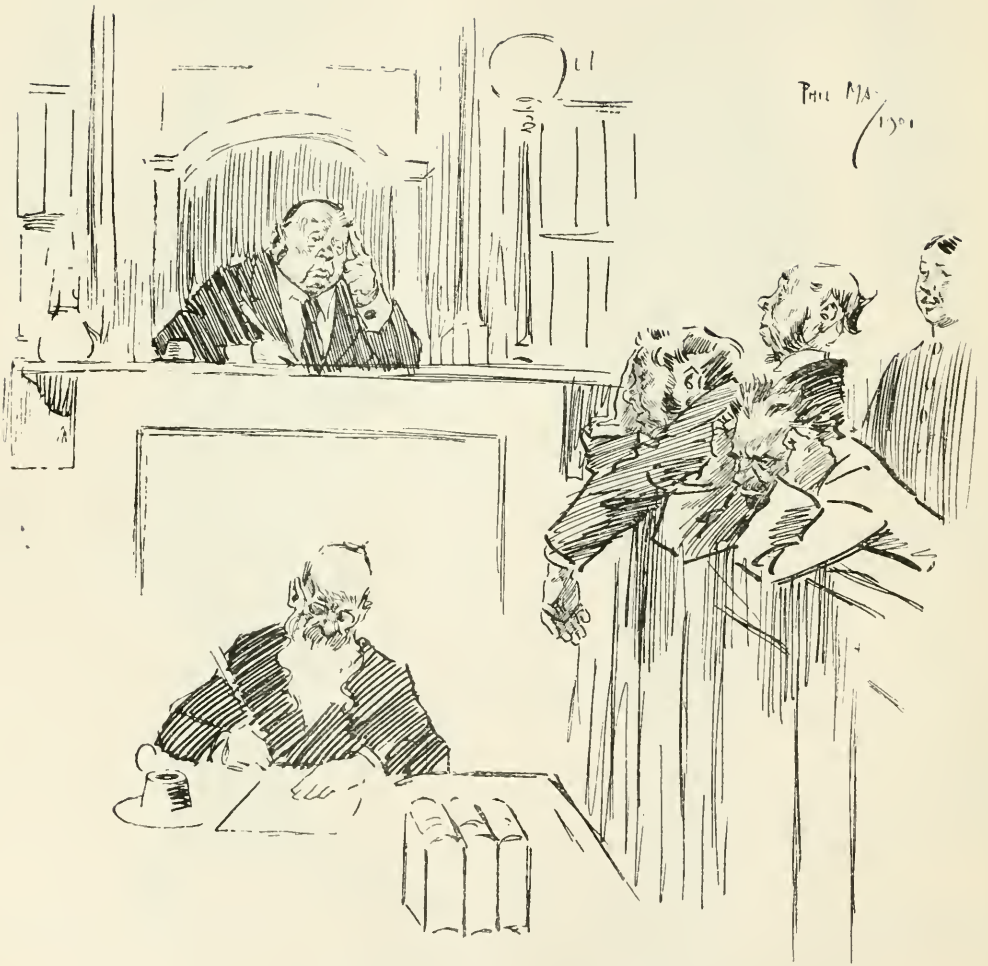
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THE LAND OF THE UNSEEN

By

ERNEST FAVENC

WHEN I first knew George Redman he was an ordinary pleasure-seeking man of the world, with an independent income, which afforded him the means and opportunity to indulge in occasional fads.

Photography was one of them for a time, but of course it was neglected when the novelty had worn off, and something else, "biking" probably, took its place.

For a week or two he dropped out of his usual haunts, and he was often seen in familiar intercourse with an aged man, who was reported to be either an anarchist or a lunatic.

Lunatic or not, he was a man with a striking face and wonderful eyes. The eyes of a visionary or an enthusiast, but certainly not of one deficient of reason.

Gradually Redman withdrew himself more and more from his old friends, and not having seen him for some time, I ventured to call at his rooms one night.

He was at home, and did not seem quite pleased at my coming. However, as we had always been close friends, I did not take any notice of it, and accepted his half-hearted invitation to stay.

His old friend was there, and was introduced to me as Mr. Whiteleaf. For a time our conversation turned on subjects to which the old

man paid little or no attention, but kept me under a steady fire from his eyes, which made me feel most uncomfortable.

His gaze did not seem so much concentrated on me as on something near me, giving me the uncanny feeling that he was looking at something that I could not see. I was relieved when he changed his gaze, and spoke a few words to Redman in a tongue strange to me.

Whatever he said, Redman seemed greatly relieved, and his manner towards me altered at once, he became quite cordial, and like his old self.

"Did I tell you I am going in for photography again?" he asked.

"No; you know I have not seen much of you lately."

"Well, it is a new phase of photography that I am studying,—or rather, what I hope will prove a new phase."

"Some further advance on the X-rays business?"

"Quite the opposite. The X-rays have developed a wondrous future, but what I hope to arrive at is something far different and far higher."

I noticed that Redman was beginning to get excited, and the old man interposed.

"I will tell your friend," he said, in a clear

and singularly fascinating voice, "what is the goal we aim at.

"Listen! I have known for long that the air around us is full of invisible and impalpable beings. Beings I must call them, for want of a better word, but what they are cannot be explained by that word, for they are not—and yet they are.

"They exist—but yet have no existence; they are terrible in their power—and yet they have no power, for they, too, are swayed by an overmastering will. We are their slaves and their masters.

"In this room they are mustering in force, even as we sit here; I cannot see them, but I feel their presence, and know by sure tokens that those that have accompanied you into this room are not inimical to us, therefore I told Redman that we might speak before you.

"Listen again! You may search the universe with the most powerful telescope that the genius of man has invented; you can track down to the uttermost bounds of infinity almost, the last wandering sun; and the plate of the camera when exposed will give others, and still others, in illimitable spheres beyond those the human eyes can see.

"Why is this? Why should the wonderful power of the camera be able to do what the trained eyes of men cannot? Why can it see through the living flesh and record on its surface the bone it sees beneath?

"Because it has power beyond our feeble strength, because it can search out the stars hidden in immeasurable distance, and make them visible to us. And it, too, when we have found the right method to use it, will seize these unseen forms that surround us and reveal them in actual shape.

"They are around us now in countless numbers, but we move through them unknowingly and unwittingly; and yet they, too, are fraught with all the powers of good and evil that sway the human heart.

"That is the work we are engaged in now, and if we succeed, we bridge, at one step, the gulf between the known and the unknown, the seen and the unseen, that has existed since matter was formed from chaos."

In his excitement the old man had arisen from his chair, and with burning eyes and eager hands emphasised his speech, as though he actually saw the formless beings he spoke of hovering in the seemingly empty air.

"It is true, Cameron," said Redman, after a pause.

"I have been studying the matter closely, and am now assured of the existence of these invisible companions crowding the space that surrounds us. Why am I assured? Because we have attained a partial success. Dimly and indistinctly; constant experiments with the camera have given us some results.

"I will show you them to-morrow. Why should it not be? The bones of the body are no longer hidden from view. The stars shining in the immensity of space, so distant that a telescope fails to find them, reveal themselves on the plate.

"So will these invisible beings in time, and I tell you I dread the day of our triumph."

"Why so?"

"Why so? The Gorgon's head that turned the rash onlooker into stone will be as nothing to what the man is doomed to witness who first solves the dread secret.

"Do not suppose these forms will be human; they will be the embodiment of the good and evil passions of those that have passed before;

what awful shape they will take I cannot guess—something so fearful that the first glance may blast the eyesight of the man who looks. But, on the other hand, they may be beneficent and blessed.”

“But surely you are not reviving the old jugglery of ghost photographs?”

“Pshaw! We are searchers for the hidden secret, honest and straightforward, not shuffling charlatans, gulling a foolish public. But come to-morrow and see what we have done. Don’t talk of this outside.”

I rose and took my leave, for it was nearly midnight, and as I walked the almost deserted streets I seemed to be haunted and followed by a ghostly company of phantoms. Horrible, because I could not guess their shape; awful on account of their impalpability.

They thronged around me, and shed their unholy influences on my sleepless pillow for the remainder of the night. I had taken the first rash step into the forbidden, and was suffering the penalty.

The next morning I went to Redman, according to my promise. He took me to his gallery, which had been enlarged and improved since I saw it last, and in it we found old Whiteleaf working amongst some chemicals.

“I promised to show you how far we had got,” said Redman, opening a locked drawer. “Look at this.”

It was a large photograph of the interior of an empty room that he had put into my hand, but at first I could see no more than that. He smiled slightly at my openly-shown disappointment, and, taking it from me, placed it on a frame, and bade me look through a splendid magnifying glass fixed above.

Then I saw.

I saw, and I did not see. The room stood

out in bold perspective. It was empty, and it was not empty.

Shadows obscured the light from the windows where no shadows should have been. There were eyes, of that I am certain; such eyes—eyes that could kill with a glance if one only saw them plainly and clearly.

The room was full of beings without shape, without form, but stamping their invisible presence by a way that was felt and not seen.

As I looked, entranced, I prayed that I should not see them, for the mere thought of the possibility brought cold terror to my heart and the limpness of death to my limbs.

“Look not on what is forbidden,” was the mandate I seemed to hear, as by an effort I turned away, shuddering, and caught my friend’s arm.

“Oh, they are here!” I gasped,—“the awful ones. Seek no further. Man must not see their shape.”

“They are there,” repeated the deep voice of Whiteleaf. “Ay, and they are here.”

I covered my eyes with my hands and tried to forget, while every nerve and fibre shrank with dumb terror.

“Look again,” said Redman.

I could not refuse, though my whole being revolted at the ordeal. I looked.

He had changed the photograph, and now I gazed on the sea, calm, motionless, and lifeless. And as I looked there gradually grew on me a monstrous horror.

It was not in sea or sky, but it was there. A momentary resemblance of evil—evil made palpable, such evil as man could not conceive, could not execute.

The maniac homicide would have recoiled, shuddering, from the mere suggestion of it, and died, shrieking with terror at its presence.

And the awful thing was still not there in form and substance, only in its dreadful influence.

I withdrew my eyes and sat down on a chair.

"Can such things be about us?" I asked.

"Do you not know that they are?"

"But why seek to make them visible when the vision would bring madness?"

"There may be more beyond—there is more beyond," said Redman. "Look at this." He changed the picture.

I hesitated.

"Nay, it will restore your courage."

Once more I gazed through the glass. It was a bedroom, and on the bed lay a corpse composed for burial.

Slowly there stole over me a wonderful feeling of peace, of everlasting happiness.

I strained my gaze to find out what caused it; it seemed to me that if I once succeeded in seeing that benign presence I should sorrow no more, but joy eternal would be mine. All my former fear and horror vanished.

"They are gods in good and evil," I said as I looked up. "Will you ever rest till you see them?" I went on, forgetting all I had said before.

"Never!" said both men together.

I became now as infatuated with their prospects of success as my friends were, though I could do little to help them, and circumstances called me away for six months.

When I returned I hastened to see Redman, having learned from his letters that a discovery was shortly expected. I found Redman and Whiteleaf waiting together, and learned that I had just arrived in time to witness the success or failure of a trial they were then making.

The plate was even then exposed in the gallery. Both men, I could see, were in a

condition of strongly suppressed excitement, and when at last the time expired Whiteleaf proceeded to the gallery alone, under some pre-arranged agreement.

Redman paced up and down, repeatedly looking at his watch.

"He must have seen by this time," he said at last, and as he spoke a cry thrilled through the house and pierced our ears—a cry for help, a cry of terror and horror, indescribable overpowering horror, so great that you felt your heart stand still, paralysed and aghast.

We rushed to the gallery.

Whiteleaf lay on the floor, with stony eyes and bloodstained mouth. He was dead—dead, with wide-open eyes that spoke still in silent testimony of the death he had died—killed by the shock of seeing what man should never see.

With a shuddering hand Redman closed the eyes that had seen more than mortality is allowed. There was black blood on his lips and white beard, and seemingly it had welled from his mouth.

The plate had fallen from his failing grasp, and lay on the floor, broken, pulverised, and ground to powder—by whom?

Redman said little; he seemed stunned and bewildered at the terrible power that had shown itself.

There was a medical examination into the cause of Whiteleaf's death, and the doctor certified it was caused by sudden stoppage of the heart's action.

I had a chance to go away again, and gladly accepted it. I was cured for a time of any desire to pry into such fearful mysteries as Redman's pursuit seemed to lead to.

As for him, blank disappointment had fallen on him. I know what his thoughts were: what use was it to make absolute this fresh discovery



Alderman Blogs.—"YES, MRS. SNEF, YOU CAN DEPEND UPON IT, EVERYBODY'S GOT THEIR LITTLE SKELETON IN THE CUPBOARD!"

of science when the success of the experiment meant the death of the investigator?

And yet I could see he had an irresistible longing to look on the sight that had blasted Whitleaf's eyes for ever. I urged him to seek travel and change.

I did not see him again for more than six months, and then his mood had greatly altered for the better.

The gloomy effect of the catastrophe of Whitleaf's death had disappeared in a great measure, if not entirely; and, above all, he had fallen in love with a young girl who, both in mind and body, seemed in every way fitted for him, and worthy of the utmost affection.

Yet this fair young girl, who was devoted to my friend, was the means of plunging him back into the blackness of madness.

One day I met him with his fiancée and her mother, going to lunch at his rooms, and he invited me to accompany them. During the meal his prospective mother-in-law asked him if he continued his photographic pursuits.

He answered "No," and the old lady, prompted by the devil, proposed that he should take a likeness of her daughter, and to my surprise Redman consented.

The gallery had been locked up since the fatal day of Whitleaf's death, and Redman led the way there, and unlocked it. Dust lay thick everywhere, and the place was close and unpleasant, and I, for one, felt the evil impression of it.

Redman placed Miss Torrance in position, got his apparatus ready, and took her likeness in two or three different attitudes, then leaving the plates in the dark room to develop at another time, we left the room, I, glad indeed to get away from the place.

Next morning I went to call upon Redman,

and to my surprise and grief found him sitting on a lounge, haggard, wild-eyed, desperate, and half-mad. He looked like a man after a long drinking bout, on the eve of delirium.

"Good Heavens, Redman! what's the matter?" I asked.

He turned his awful eyes on to me, and spoke—"I have seen them, and live."

With the words came back to me the old thrill of cold horror, and I looked at him without answering.

He spoke again with an effort—"I developed those portraits I took of Miss Torrance, and there was one," here his voice dropped, "that must have been on one of the plates that Whitleaf and I prepared. *They* were there!"

He stopped, and leaned back with the beads of perspiration standing on his forehead.

Presently he arose, and asked me to come with him to the gallery, "Not to see that," he added; "it is utterly destroyed."

We entered the gallery, and he brought me the negatives. I held them up to the light, and looked at them. They were all happily caught, one in particular in which she was seated leaning back with a smile on her face. So might a young mother have smiled at a child at her knee.

He selected that one.

"It was almost in the same position as this," he said; "and when I looked on it but for an instant, I saw the horror there. Seated in her lap it seemed to be—that awful thing of loathsome evil! And she smiling down on it. It was but an instant I saw it, and then it was snatched from my hand, and ground into powder there. He pointed to a place where some fragments lay.

"Snatched from your hand?" I repeated in amazement.

"Yes; I know no more. When I came to

myself I was on the floor of this place, with the moon shining through the glass overhead. Fancy, in one moment all my happiness cast to the winds.

"Can I marry that girl knowing that she sat there smiling and innocent, and in her lap a being of hell, a vile monster that could slay humanity with its basilisk glance if it were permitted?"

"Oh! the raging torment I passed that night in—for that one glance has cut me off from my fellows for ever. Would that I had died like my poor friend!"

"What was it like?"

"Like! How describe what human language is not capable of describing? How describe what is so far removed from humanity, so utterly beyond and apart from it that no words of mine can make you apprehend it? One thing only I saw, that there were eyes in the monster—eyes that were darts of death.

"Ask me nothing more. This marriage once broken off, I shall leave this."

The marriage was broken off. Redman's strange, sudden, and unaccountable change of manner led to not unjust suspicions of insanity, and Miss Torrance never knew the frightful secret.

He, poor fellow, wandered through the world a haunted man.

I met him a year afterwards. He was worn down with grief, and I doubt not his brain was disordered.

Morbidly his imagination dwelt continuously on the unseen horrors by which mankind are surrounded, and unconsciously walking amongst.

He shuddered at the mention of photography, and kept himself almost entirely shut up.

At last a change took place. It seemed as though he had mustered up a despairing courage to meet and fight his unseen foes.

He resumed his photography, and avowed to me his intention of following his discovery to the bitter end—giving his life to it.

There was a large public gathering shortly coming on, and he told me that he would try his next experiments there. He asked me to call on him the day after the function had taken place.

It was in the morning that I went, and found the servants relieved to see me.

Redman was locked in his photographic gallery, and about half an hour before they had heard a loud fall in there, but no cry; and since then all their knockings and callings had received no attention.

Suspecting the worst, I hurried to the gallery door, and at once forced it open. Redman was, as I expected to find him, dead on the ground.

He had been writing at the table, when a heavy iron rod, one of the supports of the glass skylights, had fallen, with no apparent cause, on his head, killing him instantly.

The photograph was in minute splinters and powder on the floor; but the writing on the table was addressed to me, and I immediately took possession of it. It ran as follows:—

"I took the photograph on the prepared plate, and developed it this morning. So strung were my nerves from the constant contemplation of this subject that I contemplated the negative without more than a momentary spasm of terror.

"Would you believe it, that the large crowd was scarce to be seen; blotted out and hidden by the unseen creatures, now made visible. I had not more than time to take in the details, when it was again snatched from my hand and crushed to atoms. This I anticipated.

"I had noticed the plate well in that brief glance I caught, and saw what I had seen before, that the eyes I told you of were directed against me from all quarters, and I gather from that

that these beings are only secure in their invisibility, and fear their discovery.

"Are they the source of all evil, restrained and limited in their action by the occasional presence among them of a Supreme Power, omnipotent and beneficent? It may be so, and they shrink from being observed.

"Would it end in their leaving for another planet world if they should become visible like men?

"I have seen them and live; and lest anything should happen to me, I will leave you, Rupert Cameron, directions to prepare the plate, so that my secret will not be lost.

"In the first place, you . . ."

Here the bar had descended, and a splash of blood on the white paper was all that was left.

The terrible and fatal secret had not descended to me.





Phil. M.A.
1902.

"HOW DID YOUR BILLIE GET RUNNED OVER?"

"'E WERE PICKING UP A 'ORSESHOE FOR LUCK!"

MR. CARTWRIGHT'S KIDNAPPER

By

G. BURTON BASHFORD

MR. JACOB CARTWRIGHT had preached passionately and long. The little suburban congregation assembled that Thursday night in a South London chapel had often heard him preach, but never like this.

He seemed to have embraced the whole world in his appeal, geographically, "from Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral strand"; mentally, from the Cabinets of the earth and the princes of thought down to the Parish Councils and their own Mutual Improvement Society; religiously, from their own creed right down to all the "isms" of which they had ever heard, and a few more thrown in.

Brotherhood, fired by an all-embracing charity, was his clarion-voiced battle-cry. The murderer in his cell was their brother; even (much emphasis on that "even") the fallen sentinel of the lamp-posts was their sister.

It so chanced when Mr. Cartwright had reached this stage in his perfervid address that a graceful woman, heavily veiled, quietly left the building.

It is to be feared that thereafter to the end Mr. Cartwright's sermon, even including its peroration, which was a masterpiece of stormy grandiloquence, shared uneven honours amongst the feminine portion of his auditors with the speculation as to the identity of the mysterious and apparently distinguished visitor.

Now Mr. Jacob Cartwright deserved well at the hands of that little suburban congregation.

Was he not the richest member of it? Was he not its most eloquent layman? Both the chapel and the cause had benefited largely by his open-handed support.

If he were a man of many words, he was also a man of action when a subscription list was opened, or a bazaar on foot, or a deficit to be grappled with.

Who gave the organ? Mr. Jacob Cartwright. Who sent the minister and his delicate wife away for a six months' trip? Mr. Jacob Cartwright. Who bought the neighbouring land for a Sunday school? Mr. Jacob Cartwright. Who built the school on it? Mr. Jacob Cartwright.

Some of the profane called it Cartwright's Colony; others dubbed it Jacob's Well, into which this rich, middle-aged, stern-faced man dropped all his spare money.

Much had Mr. Jacob Cartwright done of which the world knew. In the speeches at the chapel he also figured as a benefactor who, apart from his proclaimed munificence, did good by stealth and blushed to find it fame.

It is doubtful whether Jacob Cartwright had much private life.

His childless wife was a patient, sad-faced woman who, with a countenance that suggested

thwarted possibilities, preferred sitting by a sick-bed to opening a bazaar.

True, she opened many bazaars, for that gave Mr. Jacob Cartwright an opportunity of replying on her behalf—an act of charity on his part not to be lightly measured.

When Mr. Cartwright had undergone the trying ordeal of shaking hands and receiving the adulations of his admirers on his “most beautiful address,” he turned up his coat collar and set off for his home about a mile away.

As he turned into the dark road, at the end of which was his gloomy-looking residence, there was not a soul in sight save a beggar, who shambled up and whined for alms.

But the beggar—perhaps because he was not distinguished enough in wickedness to be a murderer—was pushed roughly away.

“If you are not off, I will have you taken into custody,” growled Mr. Cartwright,—his sermon had made him very hoarse.

Mr. Cartwright was a hot opponent to indiscriminate charity, and was on this occasion, perhaps, afraid to do good by stealth at the risk of missing the subsequent blush.

The beggar, so far from being perturbed at the philanthropist's foibles, did a curious thing.

He dropped the shamble, slipped noiselessly but actively across the other side of the road, passed Mr. Cartwright and slipped into a dark gateway. Two men joined him.

“It's all right,” he said, “the old cock is making up a fresh sermon or summat of the kind. He's grumpy enough, anyway.”

Then events crowded on one another with lightning-like rapidity.

Mr. Jacob Cartwright felt himself seized from behind, his cry was stifled in a sickly smelling handkerchief; unconscious he was borne to the gateway, and soon the vehicle there in waiting

was spinning away in the direction of the West End of London.

That night Mrs. Jacob Cartwright received a telegram from her husband, informing her that he had been called away to the North, but would be back on the following night.

So the occupants of the gloomy house at the end of that dark suburban road slept in peace.

When Mr. Jacob Cartwright, an hour or two afterwards, came back to conscious life, the soothing cadence of soft music fell exquisitely on his ear, and he inhaled a fragrance—strangely yet indefinitely reminiscent—that gave tone and vigour to his whole being.

While as yet recent events were but vague in his mind—while he seemed poised in a Present totally detached from Past and Future—he gazed around him with the sleepy bewilderment of a man who leisurely contemplates a fact without asking the Why and Wherefore.

He was in a strange apartment, furnished with princely lavishness. Oddly enough, the room was octagonal. Tapestryed in delicate blue silk, the walls were relieved by filmy curtains of dainty pink.

Such was the dominating scheme of colour and the nice adjustment of tints that they rendered the effect perfect. Illumination was derived from haphazard clusters of electric lights, in choice designs of pale pink roses and Canterbury bells, the latter of as light a blue as fidelity to nature would permit.

The ornately carved furniture was upholstered in the same gentle tints; the pictures, arranged in well-conceived Bohemianism, were ovals let into the silk-adorned walls; the ceiling was a study of blue dying away towards the centre; the carpet was as thick moss to the feet.

The whole scene was evidently the outcome

of a whimsical yet artistic nature; a little daring and unconventional in its conception, its very character, however, charmed one and immediately awakened—thus performing its main mission—a curiosity as to the author.

The wealth of bric-a-brac, the huge and magnificent cushions, the quaint collection of odd and fancy needlework indicated the guiding hand of a woman. An eye for the beautiful and the best was displayed in the choice of pictures, and the languorous air of luxury bore testimony to a love of ease linked to a pride of domicile.

A large table was set out on a grand scale for supper, befitting a prince.

A soothing radiance was dispensed from the centre of that kingly board by a mass of tiny lights softened by the dual tints of the shell-like representations of the flowers named, and from all points responded the glitter of costly plate.

Who was the owner of this elegant home? What had he to do with her?—for Mr. Jacob Cartwright had automatically decided that it was a woman.

Yet the display grated on the Puritanical spirit of the amazed spectator, for he could not associate it with propriety or virtue.

Surely this was Evil flaunting itself, as he told himself it so often did, in the garb of Art and Ease.

Then he discovered that he was not the only occupant of the room.

Seated at a table at the side almost opposite to him, busy with a spirit bottle and syphon, were two men—types as diverse as imagination could suggest.

Both were in evening dress—at least the younger was in evening dress and the older looked anxious to jump out of it.

The younger was an intelligent young fellow of about thirty, evidently well-bred, with some

knowledge of the world, and an easy manner of adapting himself to that knowledge and to his ideas of enjoying it.

From appearances he was an athlete, and one who, though by no means afflicted by the intense proprieties, pursued a moderately rational career.

The other he treated with well-bred, but plainly visible, tolerance.

The older man bored him, but the patience with which he endured it showed that his companion was merely there for a temporary purpose, and was by no means a fixture in that strange household.

The man squirmed about in his evening dress like a coster posing as an earl marshal at a fancy-dress ball.

He suggested a stormy pugilistic career. Of medium height and heavily built, he gloried chiefly in his hands, which were graced by one of the most cruel set of knuckles ever encountered by mortal man.

His closely cropped scalp was an appropriate crown to a face gnarled by conflicts, limned on the lines of never-dying pugnacity and embellished by a fine old ruin in the shape of a broken nose.

He consumed spirit as to the manner born, waxed obsequious to his superior companion, and was—the evening suit excepted—well pleased with himself.

The sight of these two brought Mr. Jacob Cartwright to his full senses. Where was he? How did he get there?

Waxing wrath, he sprang off the sofa, imperiously faced the two, neither of whom were in the least disconcerted.

“Perhaps, gentlemen, you will be good enough to explain this outrage?”

“Very sorry, my dear sir,” replied the younger



*Old Actor (laying down the law to Journalist).—“AND LET ME TELL YOU THAT WHEN I SPEAK,
I KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT,—I'VE SEEN THE WORLD—PECKHAM—EVERYWHERE!”*

man with a smile, "but we must leave that for our mistress to do. She is fond of stage effects, and would not like to be robbed of this one."

"But have you any idea who I am?"

"We are perfectly aware of that. We know that we have kidnapped Mr. Jacob Cartwright,—a leading light of Nonconformity, the brother of all men and all women. Welcome, brother, to our humble cell. Let us embrace."

And speaking thus the young man broke into a ripple of laughter.

Mr. Jacob Cartwright fumed, talked of brigandage, threatened to clear London in his efforts to locate the authors of this outrage, and, finally, demanded his instant release.

"Oh, chuck sermonising, mister," observed the boxer, who was lovingly known as Tony. "The fact is, old cock, you've just got to spend this evening in our 'orgust' society. She says so, and when she says a thing it's got to be done.

"You know that, Hazell, my boy," he added with a grin, as he poked the young man in the ribs and brought something faintly resembling a blush to his cheeks.

"And who is she?" rapped out the unwilling guest.

"I pray you, sir," observed the younger man, "make yourself at home. You are slightly out of your accustomed element, I admit, but we shall not detain you more than one night."

"It seems to me that I shall be of little use to you after that," moaned Mr. Jacob Cartwright, as he realised that his presentation watch, his pin, his money and his pocket-book were all missing.

"I will tolerate this no longer," he gasped, suddenly rising to his feet. "I'll call the police or break the house down in the attempt."

Livid with passion, he rushed to the door,

then pulled himself up sharp as if struck by a bullet.

Through the curtains came sounds that transported him back to childhood.

It was the strain of an old, old hymn tune, played with much feeling, with here and there the merest suggestion of burlesque—a subtle sort of taunt that stung him.

As he stood there transfixed, the other two watching him in amazement, the luxurious apartment faded from his mind. He was young again. He was in the heart of Surrey, right in the most monastic of its rural retreats.

It was the last morning he and his little sister had accompanied his father, who died suddenly two days later, to the odd little meeting-place where, as children, they worshipped.

It was a beauteous morning, fresh under the kiss of early May, and the hedges with their thick odorous mantling of hawthorn resembled huge snowdrifts or were like unto a series of sweeping crested waves.

Ah, the hawthorn. He inhaled the fragrance of the room. There was a touch of hawthorn in that. What could it all mean? Was he dreaming? Had he taken leave of his senses?

The other two watched his rigid posture and his tight-drawn face.

"Blowed if this ain't the queerest bit of business I've been engaged in," muttered Tony.

The younger man only smiled—and seemed pleased.

In mock solemnity the hymn progressed. Now it was not the piano he heard.

It was the asthmatic struggles of the antiquated harmonium which, as children, they had been taught to venerate over and above the much grander instrument they had at home—an instrument which, in those days, was the fetish of the neighbourhood.

Suddenly the music ceased. Instinctively he looked towards the entrance—the curtains. They were gently parted, and a moment afterwards they formed the striking background to a vision of womanly grace that well became the gown of shimmering silver in which it was enveloped.

The form was that of a beautiful woman; the face, save for the beautiful lips and exquisitely chiselled chin, was concealed behind a pink domino that was an excellent foil to her wealth of glossy black hair.

That she was beautiful even Mr. Jacob Cartwright could not bring his strong mind to ignore. Her movements were grace personified. She glided perfectly into this luxurious scheme of fantastic colouring.

Mr. Jacob Cartwright's nature was not so radically purged of its artistic sense not to take note of this. Despite his boiling indignation he was interested. Sleeping or awake, he was undergoing the most extraordinary experience of his life.

The other two men rose as their mistress entered.

"This is Madame," said the young man, "and this, Madame, is Mr. Jacob Cartwright."

"Thank you, Hazell," she replied in a low, exquisite voice. "You have done well. Tony, I shall double your remuneration. Hazell, you have your reward to come."

The young man coloured a little and kissed Madame's hand.

"Now, Mr. Cartwright, thrice welcome to our little gathering. You must forgive the novel form of invitation, but some people require so much pressing and I was fearful lest you should refuse. I cannot bear to be refused."

"Madame, I hope I am a gentleman, but I demand that I be at once released from this outrageous bondage."

"More slowly, friend," was the firm reply; "you must remember that I am the only person that gives orders here. Is that not so, Hazell?"

The young man assented, adding, "But, Madame, your orders are always favours in disguise."

Madame appeared to appreciate the compliment.

"An end to this foolery," exclaimed Cartwright, "and let me go. The air of this abominable place stifles me."

"And yet hawthorn, my dear Mr. Jacob Cartwright, was not always so offensive to your nostrils."

Mr. Jacob Cartwright started.

"Now," continued the hostess, "do not be so ill-conditioned a guest. At least honour our board with some good grace, seeing that it is for you we have strained the resources of our poor kitchens."

"Look 'ere, guv'nor, you had better chuck this nonsense. While you are 'ere, you've just got to do what yer told or else it'll be mighty unpleasant for yer, I give yer my word."

"Silence, Tony!" and as Madame stretched herself to her full height and emphasised the rebuke with the stamp of her bejewelled-slippered foot, Tony collapsed as if he had received a "knock-out" blow.

"Really, woman, what farce is this? My wife will be terrified to death at my absence."

"Listen, gentlemen," was the sneer-barbed retort, "how thoughtful he is of his poor wife. What a husband to have! What a jewel! Always think of your wife, Jacob Cartwright. But there, you always do! But, my dear friend, you have no cause to worry. Your wife is sleeping soundly long ere this. I wired her to say you had gone North but would be back to-morrow night. So you know what to say when

you return. I may say I sent it from Wulham Town Post Office, so your absence is fully explained."

"You wired to my wife?"

"Yes."

"Then you know her?"

"Yes, very well. Oh yes, I know the miserable extinguished life she leads in the shadow of your greater glory."

"Madame!"

"Now, my dear friend, do not get cross. We always exchange candid views in this house. It saves such a lot of trouble, and we like each other all the more for it; do we not, Hazell?"

Again the young man smilingly assented, as one who had undergone a fairly good trial of Madame's candour.

"But to supper," laughingly ordered Madame, motioning her guest to a seat at one end of the table and taking her place at the head, whilst Hazell and Tony occupied seats on either side.

Mr. Jacob Cartwright hesitated.

"I will not be treated as a child or a brainless *roué*. I will summon the police.—Police! Police!" he shouted.

The others only laughed. The more he raved and stormed, the greater their merriment.

"I tell you what it is, Mr. Preacher, it's no use you 'playing the goat' like that. You're an ungrateful 'blighter,' that's what you are. Fancy us inviting yer to dinner and yer taking on like a blooming bull in a blooming china shop."

Madame sharply interposed. "Tony, just keep that vulgar tongue of yours still."

"I was only——"

"Silence."

Tony was silent.

"Now, Mr. Cartwright, do be reasonable. This room is proof against all that din. Nobody

can hear you. Nobody can rescue you; though why any man wants to be rescued from a nice little supper, I can't imagine. Fall in with our ideas for once. No harm will come to you. To-morrow you will be safe in the bosom of your home."

"To-morrow I will see whether the law allows a respected member of society to be kidnapped and robbed in this outrageous fashion."

"To-morrow, my dear friend, will take care of itself. Now we live but for to-night. So, there's a dear good man, take your seat."

"But the reason for all this?"

"You shall know later. In the meantime, let us eat, drink, and be merry."

"Make the best of it, boss," ejaculated Tony, furtively glancing at Madame, as if apprehensive of another extinguisher.

Seeing that resistance seemed hopeless, Mr. Jacob Cartwright took his seat with a growl. An instant later an Ethiopian servant, turbaned and richly apparelled, noiselessly attended to the wants of the guests.

The wine was produced. Tony's face became set. He fumbled in his hip pocket, and drawing a revolver placed it with defiant ostentation on one side of his plate.

A cold fear crept into the heart of Mr. Jacob Cartwright.

The Ethiopian was about to fill his mistress's glass.

She reproved him in a foreign tongue and, in explanation, added, "Honours to our guest."

The Ethiopian glided to Cartwright's side with the wine, but the "great pillar" waved him away.

"But really," said Madame, "I must insist."

Imperiously she motioned to the Ethiopian, who was already trembling at the prospect of

her wrath, and he filled Cartwright's glass to the brim.

"A toast, Mr. Jacob Cartwright, a toast," she exclaimed in a mocking tone.

"Madame," he replied, "you are able, apparently, to keep me a prisoner here, but to break a lifelong pledge—never."

"But you will, if I persuade you, my dearest of friends."

"Never."

"Say not so, my Jacob."

"Not for a fortune."

She rose, and coming graciously towards him she pleaded with a sweetness which even appealed a little to this stern man.

When her arms stole gently round his neck, however, he roughly released himself.

"Away from me, woman!" he cried. "I am proof against such sirens as you. Let me go, I say! Let me go!"

"Spurn me not, gentle Jacob. We are all of us brothers and sisters in this trying world. Some men would have made a big gap in their allowance to be so favoured, would they not, Hazell?"

"And thought it a miserable pittance," gallantly rejoined the young man, whose eyes followed Madame's every movement with devouring admiration.

"A blight upon your wiles," snarled Cartwright.

Madame started, seemed about to make a hot reply, then turned on her heel and with a merry laugh walked back to her place.

Then in a tone of quiet determination she said, "Jacob Cartwright, you take wine with us to-night and drink level, or you never leave this house alive."

"You would murder me as well as kidnap and rob me."

"The one is as easy as the other two."

"God! is there no end to your wickedness?"

"Come, don't quibble—and break commandments. A toast to you all—Jacob Cartwright."

The three rose and drank.

"Now drink," said Madame.

Jacob Cartwright was motionless.

"Tony," said Madame, "you understand."

Tony took up the revolver.

"I shall count three—that is the limit."

Jacob Cartwright made no reply.

"One."

No movement.

"Two."

No movement.

"Three."

Tony raised the revolver and then dropped it from his trembling hand.

"Fool!" stormed the woman, clutching it; "you men always were cowards."

"Now," she said, as she pointed the weapon at Cartwright, who had broken out into a cold sweat, "will you drink?"

"No," he muttered in a thick voice. He saw her finger pressed on the trigger. He had no conception she was so desperate. His hand went forth and seized the glass, and he gulped its contents down as a bullet whizzed unpleasantly near his head.

Madame sank back in her chair with a sigh of relief.

"We shall have no more trouble on that score," was her comment; and Jacob Cartwright knew that under the circumstances it was useless to pit his will or his abstinence against this relentless hostess.

So the wine, amid that strangely assorted company, circulated well, and Jacob Cartwright partook of it, being pleasantly informed by "Madame" that it was the best of brands,



"HOW IS IT THAT YOU ARE ALWAYS OUT WHEN I CALL AT YOUR HOUSE?"
"JUST LUCK, DEAR BOY, JUST LUCK!"

it would do him much good, and that he would have need of it before they had done with him.

The talk became free, but, save when Tony interposed, only to be snubbed by his mistress, it was never vulgar. Thereat, Jacob Cartwright, who, under soothing potations, waxed quite sociable, was surprised.

It was a strange gathering—that at which Jacob Cartwright took his first wine. He felt he was rubbing shoulders with the world in its most Bohemian (to use a mild term) phase.

Yet the merry conversation, anticipated by him as flagrantly outrageous to his highly cultured moral susceptibilities, ran lightly on to literature, scouted gingerly round ethics, and even made daring, if brief, little excursions into religion.

Then it was that Hazell came out of his shell.

Keen man as he undoubtedly was, Cartwright was not slow to detect that, with all his quiescence to Madame, and her apparent domination of him, Hazell possessed much reserve power which he might be expected to husband carefully and use only when he was confident of its successful operation.

Hazell, he could see, was a man who, should occasion demand it, could carry almost any point with Madame, whose apparent tyranny he tolerated for reasons quite satisfactory to himself if not obvious to other people.

Tony became garrulous at last. Jacob Cartwright groaned under the avalanche of his vulgarisms, which glided nearer and nearer to the blasphemous and profane.

"Tony," suddenly exclaimed Madame, "you are tired. Help yourself to a whisky and soda and go."

The latter part of the instruction was obeyed

with avidity. He was about to disappear when Hazell whispered something to Madame, and Tony was called back.

"You are going with certain things that do not belong to you."

Tony fidgeted.

"Turn them over, Tony," she said, with that old air of determination which had given her guest such a shock.

Reluctantly, and with a murmured oath, Tony placed on the table Cartwright's lost property.

"You have still a ring."

With greater reluctance Tony produced that, observing, in a disgusted way, "There ain't no 'perks' to this blooming job."

"Double pay, Tony, poor dear," answered Madame; "but remember that I do not pay you to rob either on my account or your own. Call for your money to-morrow. Now make yourself scarce."

"Pick them up," she said sharply to Cartwright. "You may yet find out that we are not so corrupt as some people imagine. Now, gentlemen, you may smoke. It will ease the tension of the rest of the proceedings."

Mr. Jacob Cartwright gently refused. "Tobacco, Madame, has never soiled my lips. I pray you excuse me."

She laughed a little bitterly. "Do as you please, dear friend. Yours is a cheap virtue."

A striking change had come over this magnificent woman, who could flit from topic to topic with amazing facility and always talk well.

She paced the room once or twice in queenly agitation. Hazell watched her, rose and poured out a small quantity of brandy in a fantastic little glass. She drank it.

"Thank you, Hazell," she said, with much show of feeling, "you always seem to anticipate me."

With a sigh she flung herself down on the settee, and with a sudden gesture began—

"Mr. Jacob Cartwright, I owe you, if not an apology, at least an explanation. I will give it you in the shape of a piece of your own family history with which you are not acquainted."

"My family history?"

"Yes; and, Jacob Cartwright, store it up in the archives of your family records as something to be proud of. Jacob Cartwright, you had a sister."

"I had."

"She was considerably younger than yourself?"

"She was."

"Of course you know where she is now?"

"I regret to say that I do not know. She was not one of us. She disgraced the family, and went her own way."

"She has gone out of your life?"

"By her own choice—yes."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes—you do not mean——"

"Oh, I can only say that I must have been misinformed. I happen to know your sister's history—poor girl—so let us see if we can revise it between us and arrive at the real truth."

"When your father died—he was a good, if a stern man, I am told—he left you his fortune, and your sister completely under your charge to make what provision you thought fit for her."

"He trusted me to act as he would desire."

"That is true; and we shall see how you interpreted that trust."

"From the very first your sister did not get on very well with you. You wished to bind her down to a slavish copy of your own life."

"She was—as your wife is now—to be a mere echo of your narrow, self-righteous life, and

whatever good was in her was to lend its feeble lustre to your own brilliant Christianity. She—girl of spirit as she was—kicked against this."

"You threatened her. That made matters worse. By your tyranny you killed the love your sister had for you, and you deemed that an act of sacrifice—on your part—to the rigid faith to which you devoted your life. Of the pain your sister suffered you thought nothing."

"You considered—she tells me—that she had put herself outside the pale of Christianity."

"They say your sister was beautiful. In her solitude and trouble Horace Traill appeared on the scene. They met. His heart went out to her. She found in him a sympathy life had hitherto not given her. He opened for her the gates of love. For a time they lived in enchantment. Then came the day of disgrace—you know what I mean—and Horace married her on a poor income and in failing health."

"How did the brother look after his sister when she most needed him? Religion was outraged, and he with it. He threw her off. He disowned her. He became a tyrant and made an outcast of her, righteously appropriating that portion of the heritage which her father, in the spirit, if not according to the letter, left his only daughter."

"After that you preached all the more vigorously about the brotherhood of man—forgetting the woman who, next your wife, had the greatest claim upon you."

"The delicate husband became very ill. Your sister asked you for help on her bended knees, for the sake of him and of her little one. You refused—and next day gave five hundred pounds to a remote building fund on condition that you should lay one of the stones, which, with your zeal for the world's good, you did not fail to do."

"The husband died. Your sister fought the world—worked night and day—for her little one, and then the little one died and she was alone—absolutely alone.

"She was still beautiful. The son of the proprietor of the huge establishment where she was employed was attracted and he made love to her, promised to marry her, and then the worst happened to her and, instead of his wife, she became merely a toy. When he wanted to marry a pure girl whom he really loved, she released him from the entanglement and became—such as I am.

"I will not harrow you with a catalogue of her life after that, save to say that once she met an elderly man, abundantly wealthy, who treated her well in life, and at his death left her all his fortune.

"Your sister is now a wealthy woman, and has set her back against the world.

"When the world was going hard with her she met Hazell here. He fell in love with her. He treated her as nothing else but a pure woman.

"He was ever by her side when she was beset with difficulties. She felt the uplifting influence of his love, and now she is wealthy she is going to reward him—paltry enough reward for such devotion—by marrying him, and they are (they tell me) to attempt to forget the past.

"All these years nothing was heard of you, Mr. Jacob Cartwright, except that you were still preaching the brotherhood of man with increased earnestness.

"Now what think you of this romance as a chapter in the annals of the Cartwright history?"

Mr. Jacob Cartwright was pale. "It's all a lie—the parts concerning me, at anyrate."

"A lie, Jacob Cartwright, a lie!" shrieked Madame.

"Yes. It is an attempt to blackmail me. You shall suffer for this, vile woman that you are. How can you know all about my sister?"

"Why do I know?" (Madame was waxing hysterical.) "How do I know? Ye gods! Listen to him! Because—because I am your sister."

Snatching off the domino and revealing a magnificent face, she stood before him the regal embodiment of rage.

With a groan Jacob Cartwright buried his face in his hands.

The woman was the first to recover herself under Hazell's tender attentions.

"Leave me, Cyril dear, for a moment. I have not done with this man yet. What have you to say?" she continued, turning to her brother. "But there, you can have no reply to such a life as mine—a life for which you will be held in part responsible.

"Oh, you men, you preachers! You always have an eye to the main chance. You even carry it beyond the grave and, fearing heaven will be crowded, give a brother who is down another little push further in the same direction.

"You entrench yourselves in your own advertised good works, and annihilate with your exclusive self-righteousness the poor frail creatures who may come within the zone of your fire. You wretched Pharisees!

"But there, you may go now and think about this thing. There is my carriage waiting for you, and you will be driven to an hotel where you had better stay for the rest of the night. May you sleep well and return home safely to-morrow night in accordance with my telegram.

"Do not try to trace me. You will be blind-

folded as you leave here, so that you need not hope to find me. To-morrow Cyril makes me his wife, and I trust you may never cross my path again. Now go."

And Mr. Jacob Cartwright, without a word, tottered forth with his head dizzy from the effects of unaccustomed wine, and with some new ideas on the question of morality.





ALETHEA'S TAME DUKE

By

J. E. MacMANUS

(*In the Boudoir.*)

"DON'T worry your dear old head about the Duke, mamma. I've got him folded, brown-papered, string round him, addressed, and expressed for delivery when wanted—to Miss Alethea B. Willenchook, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York City, U.S.A."

"Yes, Thea, I know he seems very devoted. But has he said anything—anything right out, plain, yet?"

"You mean, has he materialised a proposal in force? 'Wilt thou be my duchess?' No, dearie, he hasn't. But he's very young, and very shy, and he won't speak till I pull the string and set his vocal chords going. Then you can order the cards, and we'll talk nothing but trousseau and chiffons for the next month."

Having thus disposed of the subject, Miss Alethea B. Willenchook snuggled up in her easy-chair and devoted her attention to the huge Sunday edition of one of the newspapers of her native land.

She was a superlative specimen of the Stan-laws type. A very pretty little head, very proudly poised on a very slender neck; the rest of her mainly frock.

At least, her frocks were such artistic triumphs

of billowy fluffiness that no one ever speculated as to what sort of figure they covered.

"But, Alethea," said Mrs. Willenchook nervously, inviting her daughter's attention.

Fat, placid, anxiously maternal, she had been trained by her eldest daughter in the way she should go—to honour her female children, that her days in the drawing-room might be peaceful.

"Well, mamma," replied Alethea wearily.

The effort of tolerating an old-fashioned mother, who does not understand things, is sometimes very trying to the modern daughter.

"I must say," said her mother, "that you seem to take things very easily. When I was a girl——"

"I know, mamma. When you were a girl it was considered correct to make a man think he was the finest created animal.

"Listen to his stupid personal reminiscences as if he was a dry goods Othello; gaze on him with admiring eyes when he told you of his early struggles; gush about his favourite plays, read up his pet books, and be always ready to put on your bonnet and go out with him when he asked you.

"That was about the size of it in your court-ing days, dear."

"We certainly," said Mrs. Willenchook, a little sharply, "tried to let the man, we wished should ask us to marry him, believe that we would make him a pleasant wife. You mean to marry the Duke, but you treat him as if he was an overgrown schoolboy, and instead of studying him a little you send him off to play with your younger sister."

Alethea laughed. "Jemima is much better company for him than I am, dear, to tell the truth. He's twenty-two by the 'Peerage,' but only about seventeen as we reckon men at home. Jimmie is in the straight for sixteen—and, by the way, you really must lengthen her frocks, mamma. It's all very well to play up the 'still in the schoolroom' racket in my interest, but her legs are positively improper. Cycling does develop the calves so."

She glanced with appreciation at her own slender ankles, dainty in cobweb black silk.

"I have been thinking so for some time. But it would be so much better to have you settled, darling, before we put Jemima into long frocks and do her hair up. Now, if only you would bring the Duke to the point?"

"Oh well, I'll make an effort. But it's been so dead easy, mamma, that I felt it was hardly sportsmanlike to rush him at the matrimonial fence. Isn't it two months since we met him in New York, and hasn't he stuck to us like a limpet ever since?"

"Hadh't he booked his state-room on the *Lucania*, and didn't he forget it and wait another fortnight to come over with us on the *Majestic*? Hasn't he danced attendance on us during the five weeks we've been in London, so that we can reckon on him turning up every day a good deal more regularly than the hired man with the brougham?"

"He's as safe as one of poppa's deals in Eries,

and a good deal safer," concluded Alethea triumphantly.

"Well, certainly . . . as you put it . . . but still . . ." said Mrs. Willenchook, stammering, and obviously nervous.

"But still? What?"

"I thought it would be as well if your father—if your father were to—to sound him a little. Not exactly to *ask* him, you know——"

Alethea laughed scornfully. "Why not ask him his 'intentions' at once, mamma? Oh, you dear old thing, can't you realise that we aren't living in the Middle Ages, and that your daughter is allowed to be pretty smart. Poppa must not do anything of the kind."

"You think not, darling. But I told him so this morning, and he quite agreed with me. And I think—I think he'll probably do it today. James always acts smart when he makes up his mind."

"Mamma!" said Alethea, rising, and for a moment speechless with indignation. "If he dares—if he dares! What! That—I—I—should be offered to a man, like a remnant at a bargain sale."

She paced the room with hurried steps. "And after all my trouble! After the scientific finesse I have shown in holding him off, and pretending I didn't care a button for him or his title! Oh, it's too cruel! What a trial it is to a girl to have well-meaning parents!"

"I meant it for the best, dear," began Mrs. Willenchook apologetically. "But if you can see your father before——"

The door opened, and a whirlwind of healthy feminine youth rushed into the boudoir—part of the palatial suite of rooms at the Hotel Magnifique temporarily occupied by James K. Willenchook, family, and suite.

The whirlwind resolved itself into one young

girl, with enough breeziness and high spirits about her for a whole boarding school.

Taller than her sister by a couple of inches, Miss Jemima Muriel Willenchook looked young enough, in virtue of her curtailed skirt and flowing locks, to be no more than an efflorescent fourteen.

She was no "picture girl," but a pair of wonderful grey-blue eyes, a mop of light brown hair, and magnificent teeth, set in a wide, laughing, lovable mouth, atoned for her irregular nose and sunburnt skin.

"Ain't he a peach, mamma?" she exclaimed, holding out a woolly St. Bernard pup, who slobbered amiably and made earnest efforts to lick her face.

"Billy bought him for me."

"Billy? Who, Muriel?" queried Alethea.

"Oh, well, William Hereward Ashspear, Duke of Thanet, if you like that better, Thea. You see I've looked in Debrett, too, where the leaf was turned down. But he ain't a bit like a duke, and he likes me to call him Billy.

"We've been all over the City on the tops of

omnibuses, and in the Tower (Billy had never been there, of course), and in Leadenhall Market. That's where we bought Roosevelt—I've christened him—because he looked so friendly and so lonesome."

She stopped for lack of breath.

"Where have you left the Duke, then?" said Alethea. "Didn't he come home with you?"

"Oh yes. But we met poppa as we came through the vestibule, and he took Billy away to the smoke-room to have cocktails, I suppose. Said he wanted to speak to him about something, anyhow, and that's American for cocktails."

"Now, mamma," said Alethea, looking with concentrated indignation at her mother, "I hope you're satisfied."

She passed out of the room in a whirl of agitated draperies, and Mrs. Willenchook, avoiding the inquiring glance of her younger daughter, bent over a strip of needlework. Jemima sat on the floor and played with Roosevelt.

(In the Smoking-room.)

"Cocktail, your grace?" said Mr. Willenchook, as they took chairs in a quiet corner of the big smoking-room.

The Duke, a tall boy with a good-natured, freckled face, reddish hair, and indications of a belated moustache, compromised for a sherry-and-bitters.

"It's very kind of you to show my little 'gel' round, Duke," continued the father. "Alethea was real sorry afterwards she hadn't gone with you."

The Duke smiled, a vision of the butterfly Alethea riding on a Whitechapel 'bus and

trailing her gossamer skirts through Leadenhall Market presenting itself to him as incongruous.

"I'm afraid Miss Willenchook would hardly have enjoyed it," he said.

"Mebbe not, mebbe not," agreed Mr. Willenchook reflectively. "Jimmie, now, likes to ride on a street-car all the time, but Thea—wal, she seems to belong 'naterally' to a barouche and a pair. She's an aristocrat, that's what Alethea is. Where she got it from the Lord knows; it wa'n't from her mother or me. But she hez the instincts of one of your countesses or marchionesses."



KITTENS.

The Duke murmured a polite acquiescence, but failed to take his obvious cue for saying that Alethea ought to be a duchess, which would have simplified matters wonderfully.

Mr. Willenchook, who had been feeling proud of his unexpected dexterity in leading up to an avowal, meditated a new line.

He was unskilled in social diplomacy, somewhat timid of an English duke—even a boyish one, and the duty imposed on him, which to his honest mind savoured of suggesting to an unwilling young man that he wanted his daughter taken off his hands, was altogether repugnant to him.

"Wunnerful how the young fellows run after that gel o' mine," he remarked, lighting a cigar, and affecting a mood of contemplative retrospection. "She might hev married a dozen times, last season at Narraganset. There was young Harbour—the canned meat folk, y' know—and one of the Vanderpump boys, an' a lot more. Like flies round a barrel of molasses, they were. Not that she's a flirt, y' know."

"I'm sure not," said the Duke.

"No. Just ez simple ez a child, is Thea, an' ez delicate ez a bit of china that ought to be under a glass shade in the best parlour. She just listens to the boys, and laughs at 'em a bit, and lets 'em go.

"I b'lieve," said the old man, conceiving a brilliant stroke of diplomacy, "she's jest set on marrying an Englishman. Curious the fancies gels get."

"Yet Americans are supposed to make the best husbands in the world," said the Duke politely.

"B'lieve they do," said Mr. Willenchook, forgetting his brief. "We're mighty soft to our womanfolk, and Thea wants tender handling. There's Jimmie, now; she's a daisy. That gel

might marry the roughest cowboy that ever rounded up a herd of steers, or the poorest miner that ever staked out a claim in Colorado, and she'd work with him, and help him—ay, and 'plug' him in the eye if he forgot to respect her."

"So she would," assented the Duke, with hearty emphasis; "she has the pluck of a man. And she can ride like——"

"Like a cowboy. An' shoot like a sport in the minin' camps——"

"And handle a boat like a sailor," said the Duke.

"An' cry over a sick child like a woman," said the father, his sallow face flushing with pride in his best-loved little daughter. "There's no flies on Jimmie. Jemima, my wife would have her called, as we hadn't a boy, and thet was 'sneer ez we could git to James. Wife's folk thought it wa'n't a grand enough name for her, but the wife she stood firm, and wouldn't hev only Muriel throwed in fer her second name."

"Jimmie suits her down to the ground," said the Duke, with enthusiasm. "You know, when I first met her I thought she ought to have been a boy. But you find the kernel of the real nice girl under the husk of the hoyden—pardon me for talking like that. But it came to me quite naturally."

"They're both good girls," said Mr. Willenchook, remembering that this discursive tribute to his younger daughter was drawing him away from the immediate business of the elder. "But, of course, Jimmie ain't got the style of Alethea—the—the—kind of look ez if she never ought to eat anything but candies, and never get her boots muddy, nor hev her clothes mussed about with ridin' on a street-car."

The Duke acquiesced, without enthusiasm.

Mr. Willenchook was growing desperate.

It became apparent to him that diplomacy was not his line of business. And his duty, as indicated to him by his wife, lay straight before him.

"Say, Duke," he said, with a stiff upper lip, "I dunno much about the ways of your European aristocracy. They tell me that over here fathers and mothers hev to meddle with their sons' and daughters' courtin'. I don't hold with it myself. When I went to look fer a wife I found the gel I wanted, and fixed things up with her good and right before goin' to the old man and sayin' we'd settled to marry. Mëbbe that's not the way with you folk."

"I think it is," replied the Duke, realising that a crisis was impending, and half inclined to laugh at the nervousness of his prospective father-in-law. "We pick our own wives in these days—so far as the girl of our choice lets us—and talk to her parents afterwards."

"I'm with you, all the time," said the American, extending his hand. "But take an old man's advice, and don't monkey around too long—or the girl may have a word to say about it."

(In the Drawing-room.)

Alethea fluttered into the drawing-room, ethereal as a snowflake, an angel in gossamer clouds.

The Duke was sitting on a widely-comfortable couch, and she alighted beside him.

"Oh, Hereward," she said, "you don't know how happy I am."

Simplicity and girlish delight were the correct symptoms to have, she believed.

"I shall call you Hereward, if you don't mind. Muriel will talk of you as Billy—she says you like it—but the name don't seem to fit you, somehow."

"Well, in plain English," said the Duke, "I want to marry your daughter, Mr. Willenchook—when she's old enough."

Delighted beyond measure at having got the awkwardness of his errand over, Mr. Willenchook still repressed any appearance of extreme satisfaction.

He was an old Wall Street operator, and knew better than to betray triumph over a welcome bargain.

"You're a straight man, Duke," he said. "Now, I'll leave it for you an' the little gel to settle for yourselves. Come up to our parlour, an' I'll send her in to you."

Ushering the suitor into his drawing-room, Mr. Willenchook passed through to his wife's boudoir and whispered to her, "It's all fixed up, ma; you can send Thea down to him. And don't you ever give me such a job to do again. When it comes to Jimmie's turn she can hoe her own row."

And thereupon he made his way through a side door in the direction of the billiard-room.

"I think Jimmie is about right," he remarked. "I'm afraid I'm more of a Billy than a Hereward."

"Ah, but you must live up to the Hereward, now," she said, laying a dainty little hand on his big brown paw—he had played for Oxford at Lord's only a year ago, and had fins like a large-sized pugilist.

"You have to show yourself worthy of your ancestors."

"Pretty big blackguards, some of 'em were," he replied. "But mostly good fighters—and I shouldn't like to disgrace them on that line. I was thinking of volunteerin for South Africa if

they'll have me, for a year or two—till the war's over, anyhow."

"Oh——! You mustn't," she said, with pretty authority, wondering a good deal at the idea of a man wanting to leave her for brutal and uncomfortable war service on the veldt. "I—we—can't let you go away like that."

She bent her flower-like head very close to his, that the witchery of her ripe lips and the sweetness of Russian violets that encompassed her might have due effect.

"Wouldn't you like to kiss me? You may," she murmured, thinking what an incomparably dense and slow-witted person he was.

"Why, yes," said the Duke, brushing her cheek with his lips hastily. "But, d'ye know, I've never kissed Jimmie yet. I think it's jolly nice and sisterly of you, Thea. I suppose I may call you Thea?"

"Of course," she replied absently. "What else should you call me?"

Meantime the little word "sisterly" had produced an effect like a douche of cold water along her spine.

"You're very fond of Muriel?" she continued tentatively.

"Bet your life," he responded, in the American language. "She'll make the most delightful little wife in creation—if she'll only make up her mind to try me. I haven't asked her yet, you know."

Alethea felt herself curling up small, like a worm on a lime heap.

Her hair felt to be coming out of curl; her frock had become a monstrosity; the pillars of Society were tumbling about her ears.

But she had a good stout American heart, and found grit enough to say, "I think Jimmie will wake up your English peerage—some."

"What does she say, though?" asked the

young man eagerly. "Has your father spoken to her?"

"Reckon he's just doing that now," she replied, realising that at all costs her probable brother-in-law must be kept in ignorance of the family complication.

"Poppa asked me to come in and keep you—movin', like, while he had a talk with Jim—Muriel. I'll send her to you. Bye-bye, Hereward. Hope you'll turn out a good brother."

So saying, she passed out, with a very brave girl's face and a somewhat sore girl's heart.

She had no shred of romance about the good-natured lad whom she had intended to marry, but it was cruel to lose him after such a siege of adept coquetry—just when success had seemed to be in her hands.

However, he had to be kept in the family. To be sister to a duchess would be something, and Alethea was generous enough to bear no malice to her little sister.

Jemima entered, somewhat perplexed. Called from her own room to the boudoir, she had been warmly but somewhat ceremoniously kissed by her mother, rather as if she were a distinguished stranger whose identity the older lady was not quite sure of.

Alethea, with a very white face and very bright eyes, had hugged her strenuously, and whispered "'Bully for you,' Jimmie, anyhow."

Wondering whether she had suddenly shown indications of consumption and an early death, she had been summarily bundled out of the room, with an intimation that the Duke was waiting for her in the drawing-room.

"What's it all about, Billy?" she asked. "Am I going to a premature grave, that my family has developed such a remarkable affec-

tion for me. And are you goin' to break the terrible news to me?"

The young man stammered a little, blushed a good deal, said nothing articulate, but took hold of Jemima's left hand and hung on to it. She looked at him curiously.

"You're having some kind of Sunday manners on you, too, Billy. What's it all about? And, by the way, that's my hand when you've quite done with it."

"But I'm not—anyway nearly—done with it," stammered the Duke. "To tell you the truth, Jimmie, I want it—altogether."

Bending down, he kissed the hand in question, with obvious sincerity and great awkwardness.

"Billy!" exclaimed the girl, horrified. "You're not—not—making love to me?"

"But I am, dear," said he. "Don't be angry with me, Jimmie, I can't help it. I love you so badly, and I want you to marry me."

He was crimson to the ears, but the fighting blood of the old-time Herewards had steadied his voice and made his gaze straight and true.

The American child looked him in the eye, and read a very old story for the very first time.

Her eyelids drooped, and she went very pale.

It was a cataclysm of emotion to tumble suddenly out of the shallow waters of girlish joys and sorrows into the immeasurable depths of love.

"I want to go to mother," she said, trembling.

"One moment, dear," he said. "I don't want you to marry me all at once, you know. We're too young, and I'll not worry you for a year or two. Fact is, I'm going to volunteer for South Africa for a bit, to pass the time till you've finished school, and come out, and that. And then, if I don't get shot in the meantime——"

He stopped, conscious that into the big brown hand that rested on the arm of his chair girlish slender fingers had been slipped.

"You hurt me when you talk like that, Billy," she whispered.

"And if—if I come back all right," he said, putting his hand reverently on her fair head, and trying to turn her down-bent face towards him, "you'll——"

Child's heart and child's eyes turned to him, and he felt a man with a new weight of prayerful tenderness and loving care on his soul as he kissed her and coaxed her not to cry.





"EH, MEENESTER, WHAT 'UD THE CONGREGATION THINK IF I WOS TO TELL THEM
I SAW YOU IN THIS CONDEESHUN?"

"MON" (*mc*). "THEY'D NO BELIEVE YE."

THE LESSINGHAM DIAMONDS

By

AUSTIN FRYERS

BECKETT ORME had listened attentively to Mr. Leicester Lessingham's discursive narrative of his puzzling difficulty, but Steve Armstrong, who had been watching the expert closely, had detected sundry signs of impatience which betokened a desire for brevity.

Orme had beaten an impatient tattoo with an unsharpened pencil on the blotting-pad in front of him during the narrative—the interest of which had been largely destroyed by the prolixity of the speaker—and when it was concluded he said hastily—almost as if he feared his client might recommence the story—

“I shall take up the case, Mr. Lessingham.”

“Well—I—I should hope so. That is why I came here.”

“But I please myself what cases I take up. You see, for one thing I make no stipulated payment, and I take no fee if I fail—the expenditure of time and trouble being entirely at my own risk—but when I succeed you pay me exactly what you like.”

“It's a rather risky bargain for you I should say.”

“That is why it attracts me, Mr. Lessingham. But now that you understand the nature of the bargain, we will waste no more time on the discussion of my method. Let me try and arrange in my own fashion the points of what

you have been telling me. I will put them bluntly, but, as you know every word spoken here is treated as a sacred confidence, you will not mind that.”

“Oh, you need not spare my feelings a bit,” said Mr. Lessingham; “but if you think I have not told you all the truth——”

“I am quite sure you have told me everything. What I was preparing you against was a possible view which I might take of the facts, and which you might not like. Now let us take the chain of circumstances. They begin, as you believe, immediately after the ball at Lady Carruthers', when your wife last wore her diamonds——”

“It was the following day I pledged them.”

“Quite so. But previous to this and up to Lady Carruthers' ball, this, I take it, was your position. You have a distant prospect of attaining the Lessingham peerage, and General Durrant, your wife's uncle, and, strictly speaking, the only wealthy relation with whom you are on good terms, takes a pride in this family distinction, and views with more hopefulness than you do the prospect of his niece becoming Lady Lessingham.”

Mr. Lessingham nodded, but Orme took no notice of the action, as though the statement required no confirmation.

“With this idea of family distinction in his

mind, he has always regarded Mrs. Lessingham's possession of her famous jewels as absolutely necessary, and so as to enable you to keep them he had made you a yearly allowance of two thousand five hundred pounds, it being a condition of his patronage that the jewels shall not be tampered with, and that on ceremonial occasions Mrs. Lessingham shall always wear them."

"That's just how it stands—or stood," assented Mr. Lessingham.

"Mrs. Lessingham," continued Orme, "with the natural feminine taste for jewels, has not been averse to the arrangement, and it is largely due to the amount of notice her jewels have attracted that she has become such a well-known figure in society."

"Oh well, hang it!" interposed Mr. Lessingham, "something must be allowed for the lady's—the lady's personality and connection."

"She is not the only charming, well-connected lady in society," said Orme composedly; "and as your means do not permit you to entertain largely, the fact that Mrs. Lessingham is one of the celebrities whose name is always mentioned in the papers as being present at 'first nights,' balls, and weddings must be accounted for by something, and the only thing to account for it is the distinction lent her by association with a famous set of diamonds. Why is not Mrs. Allaway ever mentioned?"

"Oh well, of course that is absurd. Mrs. Allaway!"

"Still, Mrs. Allaway might argue that if she had a similar set of diamonds, she too would be mentioned. However, this is a point I should like to have your opinion on. You have eked out a fairly comfortable addition to the allowance made by General Durrant through a constant stream of invitations to figure on the boards of various rotten companies——"

"Rotten!"

"Mushroom companies, that have done only you and few other people any benefit——"

"I really do not see how this sort of thing can help your search."

"It is all perfectly confidential. I am endeavouring to fix, with your help, the extent of the influence of your wife's diamonds——"

"And you think that by doing this you are doing something towards recovering them!"

"I know it. Now, unless you can give me some other reason for it, I submit that Mrs. Lessingham acquired prominence through the fame of her diamonds, and that it was as the husband of Mrs. Lessingham you were regarded by the promoters of these various companies as a person of sufficient importance to be worth hiring for the purpose."

Mr. Lessingham considered, and suggested, and protested; but it was evident to Steve Armstrong that Orme had established the extent of the influence of the jewels to his own satisfaction, and to the no small discomfort of his client.

"We can now take a further step," continued Orme placidly. "The high circle of society in which you move, pleasing as it was to General Durrant's pride, caused you insensibly to adopt a scale of living which made it difficult for you, without the most assiduous and careful study of economy, to square your expenditure with your income. As a matter of fact, you found that frequently impossible, and on these occasions you had recourse to one Simeon Bletchley, a bill discounter—in other words a common money-lender."

"I'm not the only one who goes to such people," said Mr. Lessingham hotly.

"Of course not," said Orme coolly, "or else they could not possibly thrive. This Bletchley, with the instinct of his tribe——"

"I never said he was a Jew," interposed Mr. Lessingham.

"Nor did I," said Orme; "but now I know he is. However, he's none the better or worse for that. As a man of business he knew that your prospect of the peerage—your only chance of repayment—was remote, so he took the off-chance, but relied on the stipulated agreement that your wife should introduce him into her social circle so far as possible. Of course I need hardly refer to the obvious fact that Mr. and Mrs. Bletchley of Mincing Row and Mr. and Mrs. Allaway of Hyde Park Gardens are identical."

"I did not tell you so."

"But you should have done so, and so I have repaired the omission. How can you expect me to make headway if you conceal material facts, after assuring me that you have told me everything?"

"I did not think it could be material," said Lessingham, a trifle humiliated; "and besides, I only know the fact in confidence."

Beckett Orme waved his hand with a slight gesture of contemptuous disdain.

"Your next move occurs almost immediately after Lady Carruthers' ball. You became possessed of information which you thought you could turn to personal advantage, and so you stole your wife's diamonds to gamble with them."

Mr. Lessingham rose in a white heat of anger. Orme still drummed on the blotting-paper with the pencil.

"It is not a gamble," Mr. Lessingham almost shouted. "I knew it was all right——"

"So you played with loaded dice then? Come, Mr. Lessingham, compose yourself; I only want to get at the facts, and it will save time if we don't trouble ourselves about infer-

ences. I can assure you they have no interest for me."

"But I can't coolly hear you say I stole my wife's diamonds."

"Did she give them to you?"

"Oh, have it your own way"; and Mr. Lessingham, considerably ruffled, sat down, breathing as heavily as though he had been in a foot-race.

"Mr. Bletchley lent you five thousand, and a duplicate set of paste jewels in imitation of the original set. The paste you put in the jewel-case in your safe, so that if your wife curiously examined the contents she would be deceived. Then you exploited your five thousand pounds and secured more than a ten-fold harvest——"

"And that is how I justify my action," said Mr. Lessingham. "I knew I should do it."

"And having done it, you hastened to Bletchley's with his money and interest and secured the diamonds——"

"I can tell you I didn't lose a moment in starting as soon as I had the means."

"And you were specially incited to do it because in two days' time your wife will be going to Mrs. de Varden's ball and will want to wear her diamonds."

"Yes," said Lessingham grudgingly; "that, too, hastened me."

"Bletchley kindly offered to accompany you to your house to see the jewels safely put away in the safe; and he remained in the drawing-room while you went upstairs."

"Yes."

"The safe is in a room adjoining your wife's dressing-room. When you reached it you found a shaded lamp alight in the room. You placed the jewels on a chair and opened the safe. Then to your surprise you saw that the



"DO YOU LIKE THEM *BIG* PIANNERS BETTER THAN THE LIKKLE UNS, AURELIA?"

"No, 'DOLPHIUS, THEY TAKE UP TOO MUCH ROOM, AN' BESIDES, THEY DON'T MAKE ANY MORE NOISE THAN THE LITTLE 'UNS."

safe was empty—the imitation set had disappeared. You were so surprised that you ran downstairs to tell Bletchley, leaving the case of jewels on a chair. Bletchley returned with you to the room, and then you found that the case you had left but a moment before had also disappeared. That is practically the story?”

“Yes.”

“You searched the entire house, you looked in all the adjacent rooms, you questioned the servants. You did everything that might reasonably occur to you in order to find a trace of the missing jewels, but without success.”

“A search could not be more complete, and I never heard of anything more mysterious.”

“They could not have gone through the window, I suppose?”

The idea seemed to strike Mr. Lessingham as a happy one.

“I had never thought of that,” said he, “and I quite omitted to see if that were possible. Someone might have thrown the case from the room to a confederate outside.”

“I suppose I can examine the rooms and the safe?”

“Certainly. Mrs. Lessingham is lunching out to-day, and if you call any time before two we can examine the rooms without being disturbed. No one has any suspicion of what has taken place, and the manner in which I questioned the servants has given them no inkling of it.”

“But you did tell Mrs. Lessingham?”

“Well, yes, I did blurt out something about the safe being empty and the jewels gone, but I don’t think she really comprehended what I said, and she now seems to have forgotten it, for at breakfast she never referred to it.”

“But she did say something when in your excitement you told her that the safe was

empty and the jewels gone. Can you remember what she did say?”

“Oh yes, she said, ‘Oh, bother the diamonds! I am glad to have done with them. They’ve been more nuisance than they are worth.’ But she was tired, and was lying on the couch by the fire half asleep. I don’t attach any importance to the words.”

“Where did you say Mrs. Lessingham was going to lunch to-day?”

“At Mrs. Norcutt’s, Glendower House, Holland Park; so we shall have plenty of time to examine the rooms.”

“Very well, Mr. Lessingham; if I am not with you by half-past one, you may rely that I am on the trail of the jewels elsewhere.”

So soon as Mr. Lessingham was safely out of earshot Beckett Orme threw himself back in his chair and laughed heartily, almost immoderately. Steve Armstrong looked puzzled, and then joined in his friend’s hilarity because of its infection.

“I am afraid, old chap,” said Orme, “you have had a dull time of it sitting there and listening to that egotistic humbug as he endeavoured to distort facts so as to preserve his own little thin coating of whitewash.”

“No,” replied Armstrong, sitting on the edge of a table and lighting a cigarette; “I really felt a touch of detective fever during Lessingham’s recital. It seems to me a puzzling case, although you make so light of it.”

“I think it will prove a very amusing one; but of course I may be wrong. My view of it may be entirely at fault.”

“By Jove, though, Beck, you did scarify him a bit——”

“And didn’t he deserve it?”

“But I say, old chap, do you really mean to

stick to this sort of life? It's interesting enough, of course, but is it quite the right life for you? Have you really determined to sever yourself from——"

"From the old life, Steve? Yes! Yes! I shall remember all of it that affects the animal—that bright, joyful animal that romped across the meadow at Christchurch, and rowed on the river till the bones ached, and then studiously read, with all the delicious langour one feels when too tired to be mischievous, under the old trees on the velvet grass of St. John's. Of course, I shall never forget all that, but I shall remember only that. The rest!—what do I know of the rest?"

"But, Beck, old boy, it is such a pity you know——"

"A pity! Steve, old sonny! A pity, and I so thoroughly—really thoroughly—contented and happy."

"But such a career—for you! A confidential agent, when you might——"

"When I might have been so many other things in none of which should I, probably, prove so useful."

"Oh, but that is nonsense. Even if you thought it necessary to change your course of life, why choose this?"

"Because, Steve, I am trying to work out my human salvation. Do you remember how all the fellows used to poke fun at Ibsen, and how we all guyed the last act of 'A Doll's House' that night we got the master to go to the theatre? Yes; of course you remember it!

"It was the night Jimmy Mower stuck those verses under Butcher's photos in the O.U.D.S. group in the vestibule. I laughed then with the rest of you, but I know now that the old Norwegian was right, and I am sure Nora Helmer did a sensible thing when she banged

that front door of her 'doll's house,' and faced the world to know why she was in it. I think there has been a deal of the 'doll's house' about it for me——"

"Poor old Beck!" and Steve Armstrong put his arm on his friend's shoulder with the loving sympathy of a schoolboy.

"And that is why I am a confidential agent," said Orme, "prying into other people's affairs to see if I can learn something of my own."

"And you mean to stick to it?"

"Yes, Steve, until I grow wise, and then I will decide afresh. And now you come and see my shanty upstairs, and see how I manage to lead a delightful existence in the Macready Chambers, Haymarket. Here, on the first floor, I have my office; but in the attic I have my heaven. Come and see it."

Beckett Orme ran upstairs as lightly as a boy of ten, followed by Steve Armstrong. It was a long trot to the top of the building, but both were strong, young, lithe and athletic, sound in wind and limb, and the exercise occasioned them but a little quickening of the pulse.

At length they reached the top, and Orme pushed open a door facing the stairs, and which led directly into a low-ceilinged attic furnished and decorated after the style of a yacht cabin.

Two monkeys were huddled together on a hammock swung across the corner by the window, six cats were ensconced on sundry of the more luxurious articles of furniture, and two terriers were basking on a soft hearthrug in the light of a wood fire.

A window, only some four feet in height, stretched to a breadth of about seven feet at the end of the room. Underneath it was spread a low couch almost littered with books, and a couple of mechanical toys. Outside was a zinc-covered ledge some four feet in

extent, and beyond it rose a stone parapet, over which nothing was visible but the leaden London sky.

On the wide ledge were some evergreens and a few chrysanthemums, among which some pigeons were stalking with their own peculiar and fussy dignity.

"And so this is your home," said Armstrong, looking round curiously.

"And my family," added Orme, with a sweeping gesture indicating the animals who had greeted the new-comer with a stare of curiosity.

"Besides this I have two bedrooms and a kitchen—quite a little palace, you see. But you must be introduced to my friends. Peti and Abe, my insolent monkeys, who are vulgarly grinning at you; Tim and Jim, my terriers—unusually quiet now, I can assure you; and my six cats, Pharaoh, Cæsar, Byron, Nelson, Wellington, and Smut. Poor Smut has no characteristics by which I could fix on a complimentary patronymic for him, so I was obliged to give him merely a descriptive one.

"Downstairs is my human monkey, Adam Smith; you saw him in the office when you came in. I picked him up in the gutter, where he probably lost his name, so I have treated him as well as the cats, and he has proved as faithful. This is my inner world. Outside I have a dozen pigeons, who taste, as my deputies, that freedom man has ever craved for and will doubtless some day attain."

"And you are—quite happy here?"

"Quite. Think of it. I can stand behind the parapet when the sun is rising in the morning, and, knowing myself in the busiest part of the world, can feel myself out of it.

"I can look down on that lazy snake, the Thames, winding in and out by the wharves and the houses and under the bridges, oozing

with its mysteries and miseries into the great lone restless sea. Looking out upon the blackness of the tangle beneath, I can feast my eyes, and my soul through them, on the growing sunburst bathing the great Cathedral dome in glory—like a monument of hope to the great City it watches over—and lighting up the Cross like a sacrificial flame."

Beckett Orme knelt on the couch by the window, and gazed earnestly into the vague sky across the parapet. Armstrong stood by the fire and did not disturb him. After a moment or two, Orme rose to his feet, and turning to his friend with a smile, he said—

"And so you thought Lessingham's case a difficult one? How do you think the diamonds have disappeared?"

"I feel sure they must have been thrown by someone out of the window to a confederate."

"But who threw them out of the window?"

"Good gracious! how on earth should I know!" exclaimed Armstrong. "But I think it will be jolly awkward for Lessingham if he do not recover them. It would be all very well for him to take them and, having fluked a fortune, return them; but if they do not turn up, it will bowl him out of having taken them."

"'Twould serve him right. However, I have promised to recover them for him, so I must save him."

"And you are sure you can?"

"I think it will prove an easy case. This is Tuesday; you will be back in town on Thursday. Come and see me on Thursday evening, and I think I shall have recovered them by then, and if so I will tell you how I did it."

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It was nine o'clock on Thursday evening before Steve Armstrong again met Beckett Orme. He had expected to be back in town



"GOOD MORNING, MISS VOSS."

"MY NAME IS NOT VOSS. IT NEVER VOSS AND NEVER VILL BE!"

much earlier, but had to send a wire to Macready Chambers to apprise Orme of an unexpected delay.

Armstrong did not wait to be announced by Adam Smith, but, much to the disgust of that young gentleman, springing past him, he bounded up the stairs, three steps at a time, and burst unceremoniously into Orme's cabin-attic. It was an old Oxford habit to which the latter was accustomed, and which the more awkward it proved in the old days, the more acceptable it was considered.

"I am afraid, old chap," said Armstrong, "that I am awfully late and have been keeping you in."

"Not at all, Steve," replied Orme; "I've had a jolly evening of it."

"Reading, I'll be bound."

"Yes."

"What? A text-book on the later methods of elucidating Social Mysteries?"

"Oh no; that book has got to be written yet. I have been reading Lilienthal's account of his visit to Vehlin in Ostprignitz to study the soaring of storks. By Jove, it was an ideal holiday! capital for amusement, and most unique for the opportunities it afforded of studying the best model Nature has given us of the sailing machine we shall some day be able to construct."

"My dear Beckett, you will never make an enthusiast of me. If Nature intended us to fly we should have had wings. But I want to tell you something. I've met a lot of people while I've been away, and someone has sent a message to you——"

A look of pain contracted Orme's features as he turned to the hammock from which Abe the monkey was practising gymnastic tricks.

"You want to speak of the life I have done

with," said he. "Don't, if you would not seek to pain me——"

"You are very resolute."

"As a friend you must help me to prove so," said Orme; and then turning lightly, and with his usual gay tone, he asked, "Are you not curious about Lessingham's diamonds?"

"Oh yes; I have been thinking out various theories, but none have proved satisfactory. Have you succeeded?"

"Yes; the diamonds are back in the safe, and everyone is happy."

"By Jove! Well, I must congratulate you. I—I really didn't think you'd manage it."

"I thought it was an easy case from the first, and my theory proved correct in every particular. Sit down and light up, and I'll tell you all about it."

Steve Armstrong "put on his pipe," and lay back in the arm-chair by the fire.

"I didn't call on Lessingham—in fact I never intended doing so, but I knew that by letting him think I should call to inspect the rooms it would keep him out of my way by keeping him at home. I went at once to Glendower House, where Mrs. Lessingham had promised to lunch, and asked to see her.

"I sent up my card, and was shown very speedily to an ante-room in which we could converse in private. I assumed she knew that the diamonds were gone, but I soon ascertained from her that she knew of the occurrence four days before her husband blurted out the fact."

"Four days!" exclaimed Armstrong; "but she couldn't have known that, as they had disappeared only a few minutes when he spoke to her."

"Strange! wasn't it?" said Orme. "But she said four days, and I did not contradict her.

In fact that was what I wanted to learn from her. I knew she was quite right——”

“Quite right!” interjected Armstrong.

“Yes, I only wanted to know the exact period. I only learned one other fact, but it was sufficient for my purpose. By a curious coincidence Mrs. Allaway was with Mrs. Lessingham at the very time the jewels disappeared.

“It was merely a friendly call in connection with one of those guilds in which ladies amuse themselves by doing good. Mrs. Lessingham was contributing a donation of clothes to the guild Mrs. Allaway patronises, and Mrs. Allaway had come to take away the gift with her own hands. There were two flannel petticoats, a fur cape, three nightdresses, and two pairs of boots——”

“By Jove, you can remember the list!”

“You see there are exactly eight articles. Mrs. Lessingham told me that they quite filled up Mrs. Allaway’s basket. Then I could see that the case required no elaborate process——”

“You concluded that from your interview with Mrs. Lessingham?”

“It was quite obvious to me then. So I went direct to Mrs. Allaway’s. That lady, as I anticipated, resented all discussion on any subject, although she readily granted me the interview. I reckoned on her curiosity securing me this advantage, and I pressed my opportunity so far, that eventually she told me all about her guild and Mrs. Lessingham’s gift of clothing. She brought it down for me, and I evinced a sufficient sympathy to warrant me in looking at the articles.”

“The nightdresses?” asked Armstrong, with a laugh.

“The three nightdresses, the fur cape, the two flannel petticoats, and the two pairs of boots.”

“You’ve got that list ‘pat.’”

“Yes, haven’t I? Well, I put them back in the basket, and then I found a discrepancy. Mrs. Lessingham said the basket was quite full, but when I put all the articles back I found that the basket was by no means full. There was room for—for five nightdresses, and more petticoats, had Mrs. Lessingham been roused to a greater degree of benevolence.”

“It was, I suppose, Mrs. Lessingham’s boastfulness to refer to her gift as a basketful of clothes?”

“It seemed so, didn’t it? However, I had heard enough to enable me to conclude that my search was ended, so I went to Lessingham and asked him for the key of the safe so that I might put the jewels in it. I couldn’t trust him, the butter-fingers, with them.”

“To place the jewels in the safe! You?”

“Yes. I sent him back the key this morning with a note to tell him that he would find them safely locked up there.”

“And—and did he find them?”

“He must have done so; I placed them there myself.”

“You did!” exclaimed Armstrong, rising with some excitement.

“My dear boy,” said Orme, with a laugh, “don’t spoil your pipe. The case isn’t worth it. If I couldn’t rely on myself to solve a difficulty of this kind in twenty-four hours I should never have set up as a confidential agent.”

Armstrong was surprised but soothed, and he resumed his seat.

“Well, do tell me how you did it.”

“Certainly. The whole thing rested on the influence exerted by the diamonds. It was obvious to me that the social position of the impoverished Lessinghams entirely depended on it. The General’s allowance kept them going,

and the diamonds gave them a status. They made Mrs. Lessingham a society leader, and her husband a successful guinea-pig.

"Who was the most likely to be jealous of this?—and jealousy is the strongest motive-power in social scheming—Mrs. Allaway! She knew all about the skeleton in the Lessingham cupboard! She knew of their poverty, and, ambitious of social distinction herself, it was only human that she should be jealous of the secret of Mrs. Lessingham's influence. On the other hand, Mrs. Lessingham was getting tired of the shifting and struggling to which they were forced to resort.

"Here, then, were the two factors in the game which made it appear perfectly clear to me. What confirmation was needed was supplied by Mrs. Lessingham's petulant remark when her husband told her of his loss—'Oh, bother the diamonds! I am glad to have done with them'—and by her subsequent information that the diamonds had gone four days previously."

"But that was a mistake," said Armstrong. "We know that Lessingham had them in the room that very night."

"Quite so, but Mrs. Lessingham was perfectly sincere in her statements, and I therefore saw quite clearly that, tired of the struggle with poverty, she had four days previously sold the diamonds"

"Sold the diamonds!"

"Or, to be accurate, sold what she believed to be her diamonds, but which were really the duplicate and worthless set of imitations."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Armstrong, "that accounted for the safe being empty when Lessingham opened it."

"Exactly. It was also obvious that as she believed she had sold her real diamonds, she must have received a price which struck her as

being an adequate return for such valuable gems; and it was also easy to fix a high estimate of the sum, as it must have been enough in her opinion to have relieved her from all immediate apprehensions of the stress of poverty."

"And so whoever bought them gave the price of real gems for the worthless set."

"That was exactly what Mrs. Allaway did."

"Mrs. Allaway?"

"Who else was likely to set her heart on possessing them, or knew of the poverty of the Lessinghams, and therefore was aware of the probability of being able to effect such a purchase? It was also obvious, following out the same line of reasoning, that Bletchley the money-lender—that is, Allaway—knew of his wife's desire to possess the jewels, and so did not inform her of the fact that he had them in pledge.

"The next step—the robbery—for such it undoubtedly was—occasioned me a little more thought. The manner in which it was effected was perfectly plain. The husband and wife were in collusion, and Mrs. Allaway had timed her visit to receive the gift of clothes so that she should be in Mrs. Lessingham's room when the jewels were taken upstairs.

"What plans they had prepared to secure them I have not troubled to ascertain, for it was obvious that chance did all they required. When Lessingham hurried downstairs, Mrs. Allaway simply slipped into the next room, secured the jewel-case, and popped it in her basket under the clothes. Mrs. Lessingham told me, you remember, that the basket was quite full, but when I packed her gift of clothes——"

"The three nightdresses——" suggested Armstrong, counting on his fingers.

"Yes; the three nightdresses, the fur cape,

the two flannel petticoats, and the two pairs of boots—when I put them back in the basket, by Mrs. Allaway's favour, I found that the basket was by no means full; in fact, there was just room for the jewel-case to be concealed underneath.

"Still, although I was quite clear as to the manner in which the robbery was committed, I did not see my way to secure the diamonds until I knew the motive."

"And you did ascertain that?"

"Yes; but it required a bit of thought, I am ashamed to confess, because after all it was very simple."

"By Jove! I should like to know what you would consider difficult."

"We have only to take the circumstances of Mrs. Lessingham's disposal of the diamonds to see it. She sold a set of ornaments worth, say fifty pounds, for a large sum. It was, as a matter of fact, twenty-five thousand pounds. When Mrs. Allaway, having taken this bold step on her own authority, confesses it to her husband, she learns to her horror that she has bought rubbish.

"Of course this bargain would not hold good in law, but people like the Allaways, who amass their wealth by a whole series of similar bargains, where the advantage is on their own side, simply

conclude in their excitement that they have made a bad bargain, or, to use their own expression, 'been had,' and they never dream of attempting to retrieve the position save by cunning and counter strategy.

"Their decision, therefore, was to secure the real jewels and hold them until the money out of which Mrs. Allaway had been, as she thought, outwitted, was refunded."

Steve Armstrong threw himself at full length in his chair and laughed long and loudly.

"By Jove!" said he, "this is the drollest comedy of errors I have struck for a long time."

"Of course," said Orme, "all I had to do was to explain the position to Mrs. Lessingham, who gave me the money she had received for the jewels. I repurchased them practically from the Allaways and placed them in the safe. And what do you think Lessingham has done?"

"Sent you a cheque for five thousand pounds!"

"No. He has written to say that unless I explain to him exactly how his jewels disappeared, and how I succeeded in restoring them, he will not pay me a farthing for my trouble.

"That is why I am a confidential agent. To discover such unsuspected possibilities."





THE CAT-EYED WIFE

By

ERNEST G. HENHAM

IT was a night of the thaw—raw, slimy, with unaccustomed fog coming from the St. Lawrence.

About the highways and off-streets of the City of Montreal pedestrians flowed rapidly, though feet often slipped upon the greasy sidewalks, while umbrellas jerked like black birds beginning flight.

Long breaths of fog wound here and there lazily. Men and women, eerie spirits in the mist, all hurried, eager to reach the warmth and comforts of home,—all, unless we note the single exception, that is always to be found if the passer will search for him.

The exception on this night of the break-up was a solitary man, walking aimlessly, peering into the fog, as though searching for some particular passing spirit. He had no hat; his body was not even protected by an overcoat. He was entirely sober; his face was white, and he was visibly perturbed.

An officer accosted him within the shadow of the artificial mountain called the Cathedral of Notre Dame, and the man replied with exceeding glibness—

“According to your lights, limited possibly, my present action may certainly appear strange. I have been walking about the city for some little time. I happen to be looking for an optician. There is a red lamp over there. See!

Down the avenue. Pardon, but I will go and inquire whether an optician lives there.”

“That’s a doctor,” said the officer, wiping the moisture off his moustache. “You had much better go home quietly.”

“But that is nonsense,” said the Frenchman. “Why will you be ridiculous? You know perfectly well I cannot go home. The Eyes are waiting for me.”

The constable stepped back against the western front of Notre Dame. The Frenchman’s face was livid, and his mouth piteous.

“Come! I will take you to your home. You will get into trouble. What have you done with your hat and coat?”

“Trifles!” exclaimed the man peevishly. “When there are so many mysterious lights flickering about the world, you stand in the street and discuss hats and coats! Perhaps I will do you a favour, and go into that store and buy a hat. Then you will kindly take me to a man who knows something about eyes.”

“Professor Pereira lives down the Avenue L’Ange Gardien,” said the officer. “I will take you there, but I cannot stay.”

The Frenchman was delighted, and with many grateful words followed the custodian’s lead, after having first purchased a hat from the opposite store.

Professor Pereira had finished an early dinner

in order that he might devote a long evening to his forthcoming book, *An Analysis of Optical Beauty*. He had just commenced a fresh period when the man was announced.

Annoyed at the interruption, the scientist nevertheless instructed that the visitor should be shown into the surgery; when he heard the door shut, he turned his glasses upon the white face set towards him, with the query, "And what can I do for you, my dear sir?"

"Eyes," burst out the man. He forthwith dropped his new hat upon the carpet and whimpered like a dog.

The Professor had lived in the world of science too long to have any heart. "Dry-eyed emotion," he muttered, professional instinct alert. "Apertures of the iris apparently unduly large, and possibly disfigured by use of drugs."

"Yes, yes," he said aloud. "The human eye is, as you suggest, most interesting. If you will approach the light, please, I will examine the expansion of your optic nerves."

The man rose, and came uncertainly across the room. "No!" he exclaimed, with his hands out. "Haven't I told you? I thought I had, but it must have been someone else. I don't want you to look at my eyes. I want you to tell me, to tell me—I want you to show me some." The words broke out like shot from an exploded shell.

The scientist looked doubtfully at his visitor.

"If you tell me what you desire, I will try to help you."

"I saw them to-night," the man went on jerkily. "That is why I came away. The fog blots them out. I could not stay at home and watch the Eyes. I thought you would show me some, and you could tell me what to call them."

The Professor rose. "A curious case," he

muttered confidentially to a bust of Newton. "I had better humour him. He may teach me something. The light of knowledge shines out of the most unexpected spots. Can you give me any description?"

"They are red eyes," said the Frenchman sharply.

"That should expedite matters," said the Professor, pulling open a large cabinet. "You have seen a pigeon possibly, or a rabbit. You have seen their eyes after taking drugs, and they have frightened you. You *do* take drugs?"

"No. Oh, never!" said the man. "I had one glass of absinthe, but that might have been a month ago. I drank it with a doctor who lives in the city."

The cabinet doors were wide open. Rows of fixed, glazed orbs stared and leered.

The man's breathing became audible; he clutched the back of a chair. "How hideous!" he said thickly.

"There is nothing in Nature more beautiful than the eye," said the Professor, with some indignation. "These require a natural setting. You want the light and fire of life behind them."

"What is that stupid, sleepy yellow?" asked the man, pointing abruptly.

"The eye of the goat," said the Professor.

"They are not red eyes," said the man, disappointed, and beginning to twist his fingers.

"Ah! but what are those? They are bright and sharp. My friend the doctor has eyes like that. They run through you like arrows."

"That is the falcon's eye," said the Professor. "It has the power to hypnotise the bird's prey. What do you think of these, the eyes of the eagle-owl?"

They were circular orbs of yellow and black, staring, and hopelessly wide-awake. "They

would look funny in a man's face," said the man absently, and the Professor chuckled at the grotesqueness hinted at.

"We haven't found what you require," he said. "Let us try another plan."

He lighted a small lantern, and switched off the electric light. Stepping back, he discharged a long search-ray into the cabinet. The orbs began to wink and leer, to frown and laugh.

"There! there!" exclaimed the startled voice.

The long ray flashed again, and a malevolent red gleam glinted from the recess of the cabinet. The Professor restored light to the room, and closed the two swing doors. "I have made the deduction," he said nervously. "You are married?"

"Listen," said the man excitedly. "When the sun is bright there is a small yellow eye, with a narrow line of black across the centre. Towards evening the eye gets darker and much larger. At night it is round and black. That is the time it glints red."

He began to walk about foolishly, his hands twitching beside him.

"Sit down," said the Professor. "Those were ordinary cat's eyes."

"There are no cats in our house," cried the man angrily.

The Professor was growing interested.

"You may like to know that so great a scientist as Lavater has maintained the theory that some particular animal type is the basis of every human countenance. The woman's eye possesses one attribute in common with the cat's. Both will glint red in certain lights. The woman also possesses the propensity of detecting, by the animal faculty of smell, the near presence of any other woman. But I digress. Will you come again to-morrow? I should like to examine your eyes by daylight."

The man gave the required promise, and was persuaded to go away.

Dr. Teran, the thin, dark occultist, paced along the cold avenue, his spare body exaggerated by a fur overcoat.

This man, yielding to a never-failing impulse, had fed his magnetic force, and nurtured his power over others, until the time had come when he could not guess at what point the former energy would fail, or how far into the unknown the latter might convey both him and his victim.

The dark doctor followed the figure slouching along the side-walk, swaying from side to side. He gained upon it, and touched the figure upon the shoulder. "Ha! Gaston, I knew your walk. It is a bad cold night, is it not?"

The Frenchman peered towards the indistinct shapes flitting to and fro in the fog. "Go away, ghosts," he muttered thickly.

"Why, Gaston! Gaston! What! The absinthe again?"

"Ah! it is you, François Xavier," said the haunted man, in the dreamy fashion of one aroused from sleep. "How did you know I was out to-night?"

"I am going home. Suddenly I recognise you in front of me. You are not well, Gaston. You must come back and I will prescribe for you."

He took the Frenchman's arm, and they passed through the smoke-like atmosphere. Uncouth yellow eyes leered and winked along the avenue ahead. The two went on, bearing the dull scrutiny of these artificial orbs. A red lamp shone like a single Cyclopean eye, and they paused, while the doctor drew out a key.

"Tell me, Gaston, how is your wife?" questioned the doctor, when they were alone.

The man trembled afresh. "I am so afraid

of her, François Xavier. I hate to go home to-night." He whimpered like a child. "I know she will look at me."

He stopped, and the doctor saw the wide shoulders shuddering.

"You must go home, Gaston. Come! Let me look in your eyes."

The man stood erect, staring stupidly, with no will of his own.

The doctor passed two smooth magnetic hands across the white face and forehead; bending, he placed his cold glistening eyes opposite the sleepy orbs of his once rival, the man who had won the love that he had lost; the victim saw dimly, as in a dream, the small subtle face, and the dark skin wrinkling upon the forehead.

But the wet snake-like eyes mastered his body and absorbed his soul. "Go home to your wife," said the voice out of this dream.

At the cold command the Frenchman turned, without answering word or protest, and walked away along the miry streets, through the city that was going to sleep; the doctor stood by his window, gazing at the few dim stars peering wetly through the ragged rack of the scud.

The man came unflinching to his home, and mechanically opened the door. He found himself unexpectedly in a garden, where distant water was splashing with irritating monotony and a few unmelodious birds sang wearily.

His eyes became bewildered by countless lights, darting, flickering, shifting in a revelry that seemed to him foolish. There was furniture in this garden, the rank weeds binding the chairs and tables.

Ah! his wife, Eugenie, sitting right in the centre of the poppies. He made a forward step, and screamed, because he had incautiously trodden upon a huge poppy head, and it burst, and the little germs bulged out.

There came a tickling pressure round the region of his heart, and he laughed softly. His wife was speaking, and her voice broke upon his ears like thunder. He wanted to reply, but immediately he opened his mouth every word in the language rushed to his lips.

Eugenie was moving, approaching him, her eyes glowing. It was very horrible. He grew cold, choked, and shivered, and his eyes closed, a tremor quivered along his muscles, tightening and relaxing. So he drifted away and knew what it was to die.

The wife stood on the threshold of her parlour, horror-struck, wondering what madness had come upon her husband. During the past weeks Gaston had grown continually stranger, more fearful of home, wilder in his speech, and now he was actually beside himself.

She found him asleep, with rigid body, and eyes sealed up. She sent hastily for medical aid.

The doctor arrived, threw off his overcoat, asked a few questions quickly, then took a lighted candle, and opened an eye of the sleeper with his finger and thumb.

A look of annoyance crossed his face. "Surely you know," he said reprovingly. "You do not require me to inform you that your husband is an opium-smoker?"

The wife gave this statement her strong denial, but on being further questioned told what she knew. Professional interest conquered the doctor's weariness.

"He is afraid of you?" he asked sharply.

"Especially my eyes," said the wife.

"Hold the candle for me," said the doctor nervously.

The wife obeyed, and the doctor bent to gaze into the eye of the haunted man.

"A strange case," he said presently. "I am

convinced that the eyes are not naturally imperfect. They have been distorted by some external influence. The refracting surfaces have been unduly curved by a shadow cast across the retina. The result is distortion of the vision by the process known to optical science as astigmatism. I may be pardoned for my mistake, because opium is acknowledged to be the cause of the great majority of astigmatism cases."

"I cannot understand," said the wife.

The doctor's face had become animated.

"Failing drugs, I should call this a trance. There is a shadow over your husband's eyes, an influence, a mesmeric will acting for evil. In the old days it would possibly have been called the work of the Evil Eye, or it might have been attributed to the influence of an unfavourable planet. Perhaps I say too much. These are the ideas that occur to me."

"Let me look," said the wife. She knelt, and by the candle-light looked into her husband's eye. The field of the retina spread before her like the vision of an unknown world.

She gave a cry. "I see a man's shadow."

"Go on," said the doctor. He muttered slowly, "The woman's eye sees much of the inner world that remains hidden from the eye of the man. The eye of the animal sees more than either."

The wife went on, "He is a tall thin man, clothed in long black robes. He wears a belt that glows like fire, and upon his head is a wreath. Ah! I do not see it now."

"You describe the appearance of the astrologer of long-gone days," muttered the learned doctor.

The man stirred, and began to pick at the air. "They are only cat's eyes," he said resignedly.

"You hear?" said the wife, her voice breaking.

"I will see if I can bring Professor Pereira in the morning," said the doctor. "In the mean-

time I will give a composing draught. I can do no more. Do not let him see you for the present."

The Frenchman slept heavily, and awoke in the early morning, forgetful of past occurrences, but fully persuaded that he was in his right mind. He dressed, and went out of the house, alone, into the cold morning, and walked on continually, knowing nothing of time or duty.

Sometimes his feet seemed to be rooted into the paving-stones, and he could only withdraw them by immense effort; at another time his body appeared lighter than a feather, and he clung to lamp-posts, fearful lest he should be lifted and wafted away through the mist.

He walked along street after street, road after road, until darkness fell, and the lamps were lighted and goggled gleefully around him. He rested, but he did not know where, and the raw light came again, and he went on walking, along more streets and more roads; there was no end to them, he thought, and one was the same as another.

After many hours the wanderer walked into his thousandth street, and stopped at last beside the door of his own deserted house. And what mind he had remaining still slept, and his brain was crushed and like ice.

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Professor Pereira underwent his lunch, that is to say he swallowed certain chemical elements, both liquid and solid, but so far as he was concerned he was eating and drinking eyes, and contemplating optic nerves and curves.

Duty afterwards called him for the detestable task of the daily constitutional. He wound his white muffler round his throat, allowing the ends to flap in all the eccentricity of genius, and sallied forth, his mind abstracted, his eyes staring blankly, his motions perfectly mechanical.

He was not really walking along the street ; he was in his snug surgery, engrossed upon a problem connected with his analysis of optical beauty. Had the lamp-posts left their stations and roamed abroad, he would never have distinguished them from pedestrians.

Professor Pereira was a man having letters and honours, but he was not clever enough to know that these constitutionals were daily rehearsals of a hygienic farce.

He reached a thoroughfare where the traffic was congested. He had not intended to come there, but while engaged upon one of the phases of the chameleon's eye, he suddenly became a citizen, and one of the crowd, and as suddenly collided with another citizen who was posing at the corner.

The Professor awoke to the consciousness that this man was also asleep to his surroundings. Before he had finished an apology, he realised that he had seen this man's eyes before.

"You are the man!" he exclaimed. "The man who never came back." He tugged at a limp arm, and the man began to have his being and move again.

"Go away, little fool," he said irritably.

"You must not speak to me in that manner,"

said the Professor. "I am going to help you. What are you doing here?"

"I don't know," said the man.

"Tell me where you live."

The man shook his head in utter despair.

"What is your name then?"

"I must have lost it," said the man.

"But you remember the Eyes? Where is your wife?"

A ray of recollection seemed to strike across the man's brain. "Yes, yes, I remember," he said excitedly. "Listen ! I went into the house. It might have been long ago. Perhaps it was to-day. My wife was not there."

"Yes," said the Professor eagerly. "Your wife was not there?"

"There was a strange cat sitting on the chair. A big cat, with eyes that glinted red."

"Really," said the Professor.

"I killed it," said the man.

He started away, as though smitten with dread, and before the Professor could move to interfere he had melted into the crowd.

Professor Pereira shivered a little and pulled at the ends of his white muffler.

"Quite mad," he muttered. "It is a pity. He would have been more interesting had he been less mad."





Youngster.—"FATHER, TEACHER SAYS I'VE GOTTEN TER BRING A PENNY WI' ME TO SCHOOL TERMORRER 'TER BUY A SLATE PENCIL WI'!"

Parent.—"GO IT! GO IT!! THAT MAK'S NINPENCE-'ALF PENY I'VE SPENT ON YER EDUCATION ALREADY."

THE WINNING OF ELFGIVA

By

PHILIP VERRILL MIGHELS

WHEN I awoke an ache was in my head, for an ugly wound was open on the scalp, and blood had matted a dank, double-fistful of my hair.

I had not yet risen when, from a spring hard by, my serving-man came with a piece of battered helmet, dripping full of water. This he gave me, and he marvelled that I sat up at all.

"I feared that I should be obliged to hunt me a new master altogether," said he.

"How did it happen?" I asked.

"It was Fiongall. He struck thee smartly from behind; his sword cleaved the helm till I groaned and ran away into the thicket. The iron's thickness saved thee; but he thought thee dead, as so did I, for the fall was a heavy fall. Then, thou being down, he cut away the armour and all but what is left, and took thy sword and horse, after which he cursed thee and left the wood."

"Coward!" said I, getting again upon my feet. "'Tis a dog's revenge for a fight fairly won! Baresark he has left me, but not yet dead. Baresark I shall fare till I meet and slay him. I shall fetch out that old sword which is Head-Splitter."

So saying, I strode to a stream, plunged in and laved my hot limbs and cleansed my hair of the clotted blood. Thereafter we went together to a

mighty clump of rock, in which there was a cleft no larger than enough to admit a man side-wise.

Into this I forced my way, and groped with my hand until presently I clasped the hilt of a weapon which was driven through the helmeted skull of an ancient warrior, who had been slain and crushed within the crevice to rot with the steel.

As I touched the handle, a rush of boyish recollections came upon me. In all of these I felt the great sword in my grasp, and was aware of the many repeated failures which I had made when with all my strength I had attempted to unsheath the weapon from its hold.

But now I clutched it with a man's determination, and strove so hard that suddenly the ground trembled and the sword came screaming forth, stained with old blood and yet not rusty.

I kissed the blade in due reverence, knowing its mystic power and worth, and the legend of its sheathing in the skull of the giant who had wielded it of old and who was now long gone to a vast eternity.

Away from the place we went, and passed the moors, the forests, and the hamlets, until by night we came to a copse that was near the fen whereon the knights held tournament on the morrow.

This was not too far beyond the shadows of the hall wherein many knights held revel and

slept. There we lay down for slumber, I having reason for desiring to be quite unseen.

When the morning was well begun, the gates of the hall were burst and the knights, in gleaming raiment, and with pomp and circumstance, issued therefrom, coming away to the field. A fine array was here, all of which was observed from the high pavilion by the old Earl and by the ladies.

At the play the men-of-arms went soon, till many a noble crest was in the dust and many a harness needed a skilful hand at mending. Foremost of the victors was Fiongall, smiting with a sure hand and jousting merrily as he sat on his powerful horse.

In his helm was a favour which he declared he held against all comers, the same being a fillet from the hair of Lady Elfgiva. However, he had filched the ribbon, and wore it perforce and not by her consent, as later I knew.

Near the end of the sport came young Ascelin, the companion-in-arms of Fiongall, and mounted upon no other than my own very mare. He being engaged by stout Thorgill, was overthrown and cast upon the sward.

Thereat the mare came galloping away, with a lance caught in the trappings. From the copse I called her, and she whinnied a gay response and cleared the distance between us, to stand delightedly under my hand-stroke and to rub her nose on my shoulder.

Hastily I mounted, gripping the lance, and away to the tourney we went, heading for Fiongall, who glanced haughtily along the fen. My cry of challenge rang loud in his ears.

He turned and paled at the sight, thinking me come as a ghost to fight. Yet he wheeled his horse to fly at me, being soon aware that hot flesh and bone and no spectral shade were here.

A cry arose, for all who were assembled saw that I fought baresark ; yet nought could stay the clash. I had no shield, wherefore I tricked him an old trick, out-twisting his lance from his hand with mine, so that we came together furiously and were both dragged down from the horses that we rode.

I was afoot at once, with sword in hand, and thirsting to be letting his blood. He also arose, his fury shown upon his face. Fool, he knew nothing of the two-edged Head-Splitter I had dragged from the skull.

He made fearful onslaught, smiting at my unhelmed crest with his glittering steel, while the sparks shot forth and the clangour of blows resounded against the welkin.

What a fire and might were in the sword I held ; and what a fury of action it compelled ! The lust of my sinews increased as I drave him backward with the blows. With the weapon I severed the point from his blade.

Then with a vengeful swing I fetched him a slash that struck upon his armoured neck and stopped no instant till his casque and mail and bone and flesh were cleaved, and his head and fighting arm fell to left of me, while his fearful torse was toppled to fall upon the other side.

A shudder came first upon the women and on the knights, and then a shout arose acknowledging my prowess. I plucked the favour from the gory helm, and carried it, in humbleness, to give it again to Elfgiva, as she sat, trembling, in the pavilion.

"Nay, thou shalt wear it, knight," she whispered.

I looked upon her face and loved her,—I that had loved no woman yet. Her eyes betrayed her heart, for they beamed with love for me, and I read her secret in them.

But a scowl was on the countenance of the

old Earl, her uncle. He bade the maids withdraw, and us to go within the hall to the feast.

Many a knight drank deep at Alfgar's board, and great was the revelry and good feeling, for a feasted man is a man of smiles and song.

Near the foot of the table I was placed, howbeit the courtesy was scant that let me so to sit. Thus I was far removed from sweet Elfgiva, who sat with the scowling Earl, where I could get no messages from her heart except through her smiling eyes.

At length the minstrel arose and sang many songs that were gay and melodious, referring in turn to the knights and to their doughty deeds. Yet when he came to me, he sang no name and scant praise, but instead asked many a mirthful question, touching upon the youth that baresark fought.

When he had so sang I begged his harp and twanged it lustily, singing in a loud voice that I was the son of a bold Viking, ready to make my name, in blood, if need be, and bidding defiance to all or any who might feel disposed to test the Head-Splitter in combat.

After this I sang a verse of love which I knew would be understood by my Lady Elfgiva.

Therewith I sat down, amid the angry murmur from the knights of the southern parts, who somewhat dreaded the steel which had carved their Fiongall in twain. But there were exclamations of loyalty and fealty from the doughty men of the North.

Among these Thorgill was the first, and he anon declared himself, as indeed did many another, my man, to fight or to die with me. So that I had actually a goodly lot of housecarles in the very hall of the haughty Earl.

The end of the feast being nigh, Elfgiva asserted her right of hospitality, and came to me with a golden cup brimming with wine. This

I drank, as the Earl scowled, and I heard her whisper as she turned to go—

“Save me.”

In my soul I instantly swore to do whatsoever she wished, and so informed her with a glance, yet I knew not at all what manner of menace she was under.

Before the dawn my man aroused me and begged me follow him forth, where he could speak unheard.

Then he informed me of the going away, an hour before, of the old Earl and a handful of housecarles, for the purpose of conveying the sweet Elfgiva to the hall of Arnulf, many leagues distant, there to give her in wedlock to the young lord.

All of this knowledge Martin had acquired from the servants.

I knew now the necessity of saving Elfgiva, and the portent of her supplication.

“My mare,” said I; “she is got ready?”

“Beausire, she is,” rejoined Martin.

“Then we go alone,” I replied. “We will succour the maiden and bring her away. Ere we are done there'll be wedding enow, I promise, and of other ceremony no lack.”

It was ill to be an hour behind, for the way was not well known to us, and of rescue therefore we should have no chance before the party should reach the hall of Arnulf.

We rode all day. At length, by sundown, we saw, across the plain, the towers of the hall, and approaching them, a league in our lead, the cavalcade wherein was the Earl and Elfgiva the beautiful.

“Better you go unknown,” said Martin.

This was true and wise enough, therefore with a mixture of armour and of skins of beasts, which he had brought, he fashioned me a dress that quite disguised my look.



"THE UPPER TEN."

Himself he also altered in appearance, so that when we came to the hall we were made welcome as errant strangers, according to the hospitality of the time.

That night they held high revel in honour of the coming of Elfgiva, and of the betrothal.

Arnulf drank himself red and boastful, making free with his promised bride till the maid was mortified beyond speech, and I was fain to split him full length with my steel. Feeling thus, I sang a short song, indiscreetly, to tell my love of my presence.

I was duly made glad to catch her glance of recognition, yet I was betrayed by a lynx-eyed rascal who pierced my disguise. He spake to Alfgar, who said nothing at the moment, but whispered the secret to Arnulf, whereupon the three together, concealing their knowledge, made plan for my total undoing.

Martin, meanwhile, had agreed to discover in which part of the castle the fair Elfgiva would lodge, upon which information we could lay our plan for bringing her away in the morning.

With smirks and smiles, far too plentiful to bode anything but evil, young Arnulf bade the seneschal house me in a vast place, obviously prepared for me that night and not commonly employed for sleeping.

It was quite removed from the other halls. However, this I little minded, and I dared not seem to protest for fear of discovery.

Cunning Arnulf! Yea, and what a coward withal! I had lain to catch a moment's rest, Martin then being upon his quest to discover the bower of Elfgiva, and I had dozed, when a sullen roar smote upon my hearing.

Another then, no less terrible, answered. I sprang up, sword in hand, peering into the dark corners and discerning nothing, so dim was the light from the stars. From a door, which had

been opened secretly, now appeared four blazing points of light, that moved in pairs and came upon me stealthily.

A low, rumbling growl, as of satisfaction, came like the echo of the previous roars. Instantly I knew that I was indeed betrayed; that I had been lodged here, away from the other halls, purposely; and that Arnulf the crafty, the keeper of wild beasts, had loosed a pair of lions hungry for meat, that their feeding should be on the body of his rival.

I was as fierce as the brutes. Along my head the hair bristled, and over my limbs crept a tingling that made my skin like that of a plucked bird, for I joyed at the prospect of the fight.

The brutes had seen me and were bellying along, judging their distance.

Never should they get the first leap. While yet they lashed their sides with snake-like tails I bounded forward. On the instant the creatures arose in the air, flying upon me.

Hoi! what a mighty slash I slashed the foremost! A mountain of muscle he seemed, as, with outstretched paws, armed with their unsheathed weapons of bone, he loomed on a level with my head.

The blade descended athwart his leg and swelling chest, on the side thereof, and sank into bone and flesh till it felt like the cutting of mud and willows, and cleaved him so nearly through that the pieces doubled, hinge-like, and fell straight downward, dragging the Head-Splitter from my clutch.

But like the falling of a tree-trunk the beast that was left landed full upon my neck and breast. I stood to the shock, for my feet were wide apart, and with a lusty gush of energy I grappled the beast and we swayed backward and forward in the fight.

She was a demon! She ripped my chest in long parallel gashes; she scored my legs with her hind feet; she sought to sink her teeth in my throat. I grasped the great head, to choke and twist and dig my fingers in, till I broke her jaw.

Then it seemed as if I should wrench the back-turned skull and snap the bone in twain, but the creature, in her rage, smote me fairly in the face with her massive paw, and I reeled backward, locked in the deadly embrace.

I should then have been done, with the fight all but mine, but on a sudden the air hissed from the edge of a blade, descending, and the back of the brute was cleaved, bringing her death on the instant.

I threw her off and staggered up, half blinded and bloody as I was, and saw—Elfgiva!

Yea, Elfgiva, pale and swaying, but matchless and noble—the whole incarnation of womanly love and heroism. She it was that had fetched the slash with the Head-Splitter,—she that had learned of the plot against me and had come, at the utmost peril, there to smite the beast to the death!

The blade forthwith became hers and mine forever, because of the stroke.

From her gown then she tore pieces of cloth and bound my arms and wounds, and stanchd the flow of blood, making me all but a baby, and kissing me sweetly.

Then Martin came back to report himself baffled and Elfgiva gone, only to find her come, and to see the dead animals stretched along the gory floor.

Out of the place we went. My mare was in readiness, by Martin's procuring, as also was a palfrey for the maiden and a swift steed for himself.

On this latter he rode quickly away, to warn

Thorgill and the others, who had become my men, that the bride was mine and we now coming, wherefore a few were to sally forth to meet us, while the rest should get in readiness the long boat with the snake's head on her prow.

Thus we fared forth, Elfgiva and I, alone, retracing the way to the hall of Alfgar. But partly because we loved each other and paid small heed to what was about us, and partly because we were a little unacquainted with the country, we went astray from the road, losing thereby a considerable time.

When it was near noon we had nearly emerged from a narrow pass, and jogged along happily, side by side, when suddenly a shout arose to the fore. In full tilt came Arnulf and six of his housecarles, he with levelled lance, they with brandished swords.

"Hoi for the blood on the Head-Splitter!" I cried, and plunging forward dashed at Arnulf, who was foremost of the knights and clothed in metal.

He missed my body by a hair's-breadth, for he had not counted on the cat-like turn in my saddle.

Then his head fell behind his horse, and his body nearly in front thereof.

With the spout of his blood I felt the energy and fierceness of a desperate man fearfully beset.

I slashed the neck of the horse that came up next, thereby fetching man and all to earth and somewhat blocking the way.

I then attacked and slew the comers as a butcher slayeth sheep. Not a man among them could wield a blade against the double edge of the Head-Splitter; not an arm could ward when a blow was come; not a mail nor a helm could turn that hungry steel.

So fell the man that was unhorsed, and so

perished three more after him, while two were glad to turn and flee with the news to Alfgar, attributing magic and marvellous powers to my sword and arm.

And though I bled freely from wounds, Elfgiva kissed my hands and face, and mended me anew, and dubbed me her King, the Fearless.

Thus was the bringing away of the bride. And ere the night the long boat was launched, and twenty fellows, lusty and brave, hung their targets and bucklers along the gunwale and manned the oars that frothed the sea.





A DUET.

A GALLANT MUTINY

By

JOHN LE BRETON

THE new day came to its reign with all the pomp of raging tempest and the wild music of thunderous blasts and roaring seas.

The wind shrieked through the cordage of the British gun-frigate *Blanche*, now and then with an access of frenzied strength shaking her spars until they quivered.

The cold dawn permitted a view of the lowering heavens, massed with great black clouds that opened only to discharge their burden of rain and sleet wherewith the winds might scourge the rioting sea and its ships.

The huge grey-green waves rushed with fearful swiftness upon the trembling frigate, battering against her stern, and pushing her on to sudden starts, ever threatening to sink her into unknown depths, and ever failing to find a higher level from which to fall upon her, until the winds, in scorn of their futility, whipped off their crests frosted with white spray, and dashed them over the ship's bulwarks to sweep along her decks.

Lightly enough the *Blanche* rode the ocean save when wind and water combined to destroy her, and at those times she seemed to be lost among the waves which reared themselves to the height of her bulwarks. Then with a roll and a plunge, she would shake them off and

send the wind-borne seas pouring off her decks and through her open scuppers.

A few men were on the quarter-deck, and more on the fo'k'sle, none venturing into the waist where the tumultuous waters, having torn one end of a spare spar from its lashings, were throwing its loose end about in a manner that threatened disaster to the deck.

Standing aft was Captain Gillespie, an officer whose name was well and favourably known to my Lords of the Admiralty, and with him was the second in command, Lord Stephen Hatton, a mere youth, with no great love for the hardships of a sailor's life, but first "Luff" by grace of his family connection.

The group was made up by weather-beaten old Seagrove, a sailor hardened by twenty years of merchant service before he joined His Majesty's service in the year 1780. He was sailing-master of the good frigate, and was anxiously watching the spars as they bent like fishing-rods, even though all the sails but the foretop sail were close furled, and that double-reefed.

Presently the boom of the loose spar against the coamings of a hatch sounded through a temporary lull in the gale, and brought his gaze downwards. The first lieutenant also saw the danger, and he acted promptly.

"Come along, lads!" he shouted to a couple

of men who were holding on to the belaying pins as he moved forward; but as he did so a heavy sea struck the vessel on the weather quarter, and running along it lifted the cutter hanging there, smashed it against the side and left the torn bows of it swinging.

The fore men lashed to the wheel made desperate efforts to get the ship's head before the wind once more, and Seagrove shook his head doubtingly as Lord Stephen shouted to the men again.

It seemed a hopeless job to tackle that spar.

The lieutenant sprang forward, and holding by every vantage, plunged into the two feet of water washing about the deck and tried to reach the spar. Shamed by his action, the men followed him, and the master called to them—

“Cut it loose!”

They had reached the waist when a great wall of water raised itself above the side, towered for an instant and then fell, pouring on board and driving them bruised and breathless against the rigging.

There was a pause, and then the lieutenant went forward, dodging the floating end of the spar and trying to get a rope's end round it.

The carpenter began hacking at the lashings aft, and the other man was hauling himself onward to bring his officer back, when again the invading water rushed in, taking both officer and man with it in its retreat, leaving the carpenter clinging in safety against the side.

There was no chance of rescue, but in a moment the swirling wave carried the young lord back and flung him against the mizzen rigging, to which he clung strongly; and then as the ship heeled over and brought him clear

of the ocean's grip, he climbed on board just as the carpenter had severed the last lashing and escaped aft.

Again came a heavy sea, and the spar butted at the ratlines, and then, swinging round, went overboard after the sailor who had now disappeared among the waves.

Captain Gillespie shook his young officer's hand heartily, and there the matter ended. It was a sailor's risk bravely taken, and appreciated by those who were ready at any time to dare and do as much.

As the day grew old, the gale wore itself away, and at last died down under a blanket of rain; the sea was still swelling boisterously, but was no longer dangerous.

Then came a tack and a beating against the final struggles of the gale, as the *Blanche* sought to return and watch the harbour of Pointe-a-Pitre, where was the French frigate *Pique*, which for six weeks had lain under the guns of the fort there, fearing to come out and encounter the British vessel.

The morning gleamed rosily over the skies after the storm, all blushing for the rude tyranny of its predecessor. A light breeze filled the great sails of the *Blanche*, and her bows sped through the water in splashing haste, cutting a white pathway through the blue.

“Sail ahead, two points on the weather bow,” sang the lookout aloft, and instantly all hands were eagerly watching the white point where the upper sails of some vessel showed on the horizon.

“The *Pique* for a thousand,” cried Captain Gillespie, with enthusiasm. “She's taken advantage of our absence to make a run for it. Don't steer for her, master, but make straight for the harbour, and then if she sees us and turns tail we can cut her off.”

Sail was crowded on until the good ship rolled under it, and yet as she flew on she was all too slow for the impatient tars who for weeks had burned to thrash the "Frenchy."

As the *Blanche* neared land, she approached the strange sail more closely, and it was not long before there was a mutual recognition. The French frigate was observed to 'bout ship and make sail for port with all haste, but the manœuvre lost her a couple of knots.

Then came a race between the two vessels, each sailing for the same point, the angles of their courses narrowing as knot after knot was passed. On board the *Blanche* the men were fretting with dread lest the enemy should beat them in the race, only the sailing-master remaining cool and watching his masts.

"She'll escape us," cried the young lieutenant a score of times as he and Captain Gillespie paced the quarter-deck together.

"Take nothing off her, master; we must risk her sticks!" said the captain, as he noticed old Seagrove's anxious face. Then stopping in his impatient striding to and fro, he cried out triumphantly—

"We're out-sailing her, Seagrove! We're half a knot faster, and we'll cut her off yet."

There was a loud hurrah from the men who stood close by, which was taken up by the rest of the ship's company, who understood its purport well.

Suddenly the *Pique* altered her course, and her action was greeted by another, a mighty roar of joy, as the British saw that their foe was not to escape into harbour. At once the *Blanche* was headed for the south, and eager eyes watched her gaining on the enemy as the day crept on.

At last the French captain, seeing how useless was the attempt to shake off so persistent a

pursuer, waited, cleared and ready for action; and on board the *Blanche* a very thunder of cheers welcomed the order to man the guns.

It was six o'clock of the evening when the two vessels approached, each endeavouring to obtain the weather gauge of the other. The *Pique* carried thirty-six guns and her adversary but thirty-two, and those of lighter metal, whilst the French crew were four hundred against half that number of British.

"Double shot the guns, aim low, and wait for the word," was the order passed along on board the *Blanche*, and all alert and wild with excitement the young lieutenant entered his first battle, a moment he had longed for and dreamed of with fond anticipation.

With a sheet of quick flame the enemy's guns opened fire, and the shot came crashing on its devastating way, cutting ropes and knocking over two of the men.

"Fire!" came the order aboard the *Blanche* as she ranged close alongside, and then as her gunners obeyed, the two ships canted over from one another with the shock.

"Make fast there!" and as he gave the order the British captain was in the act of securing the enemy by a light hawser, with which he had lashed her bowsprit to his capstan.

It was the last command he ever gave, for at that instant the *Pique's* guns spat again; there was a flash and an echoing roar, and Lord Stephen saw his chief's body almost cut in two by a chain shot which went rushing across the deck, carrying death and destruction with it.

It was a moment of blasting horror.

The lad's face was bespattered, and his hands dripped with the blood of a man who but a moment before had stood beside him in gallant strength, and was now a meaningless mass of torn and shattered flesh and bone.

A deathly sickness seized upon him, and his brain was dazed.

Then through the turmoil came old Seagrove's stern voice with the order to "bout ship," for the *Blanche* had passed her foe.

Quickened from his brief lethargy to a very madness of fear, the young lord turned and shouted, nay, almost shrieked his order to his subordinates.

Simple enough his words were, but as they left his dry lips they seemed at the instant to paralyse the battle-drunk crew.

"Let go all! Quarter-master, keep her steady. The captain is dead: let us escape while there is time!"

A murmur of disapproval, which swelled and deepened into a mutinous roar, went up from the ship's company, and the second lieutenant, with anger and shame reddening through his weather-bronzed skin, strode up, saying fiercely—

"Sir, would you disgrace us? They have lost ten men for our one! 'Bout ship, or I'll not answer for the men!"

"I command here! Let any man touch a rope at his peril," was all the reply, and the men stood with the ropes in their nervous hands, waiting and still incredulous.

The sailing-master approached the antagonistic pair, of whom one was frenzied with unreasoning terror and the other with pure rage, and addressed Lord Stephen with marked politeness and no less marked decision.

"If you will go to your cabin, sir, Lieutenant Frodsham and I will fight the ship, but, by the God above us, we won't turn tail!"

Just then the Frenchmen realised that the *Blanche* was actually leaving them, and they volleyed a contemptuous cheer after her which sent the warlike blood boiling to every British heart.

"D'ye hear that, my lord? They're jeering at us!" burst out Lieutenant Frodsham, literally trembling with fury, and losing all control over himself he made as though he would strike his superior officer to the deck.

"Marines, form here!" shouted Lord Stephen, and as the jollies came tumbling aft in their instinctive habit of obedience, he stepped behind them.

"Now, fire on the first man who touches a rope," he said. "I'll teach these devils to mutiny. Whilst I live to prevent it, this ship shall not be captured by superior force and my crew slaughtered like a drove of cattle!"

Threatening groans came from the men forward, and with a grim look Seagrove walked away. Every minute the distance between the two ships was increased, the *Pique* sending a few shots after the British vessel in derision, but not offering to give chase.

Then came one of the gunner's mates to Lord Stephen with a message from Seagrove.

"The master would like a word with you, sir."

"Tell the damned mutineer to come here! How dare he send such a message to me! By Heaven, I'll put him in irons for this!"

The man saluted respectfully, but there was a glint of ironic humour in his steady eyes as he said very quietly—

"The master is down in the magazine with a light, sir, and he says if you don't come he'll blow up the ship."

It was another shock of horror, and it almost stunned the young commander.

He hesitated, but not for long, and then he went forward and stood at the hatchway, and with a stream of wild oaths bade the mutineer come up out of that.

"When we've beaten the 'Frenchy,' and not before," sang out the master with resolute cool-

ness; " 'bout ship, my lord, and after her, or by God we'll go to Kingdom Come and report you to the captain there!"

There was something in the old man's tone that made further parley impossible, and presently the *Blanche* was rounding amid the uproarious cheers of her company, and making for the *Pique*, where she lay repairing her damage.

The British wanted no bidding this time, and as the *Blanche* came alongside, a dozen active tars lashed the two ships together, and there they rolled, yardarm to yardarm, spewing death from their guns, the Frenchmen encouraged by the enemy's previous show of weakness to make desperate resistance.

Hour after hour passed, and still the fighting went on amid smoke and shooting flame, the booming of guns and the crushing of wreckage, and yet there were no signs of surrender.

Again and again Lord Stephen journeyed to the hatchway and called down to the stern old sailor in the magazine, commanding him or imploring him to give up his design, telling of fresh disaster to the men, of fallen spars, of a shattered wheel, of ebbing lives, and still came the determined answer from below, never varying by so much as a word—

"Take her, or up we go and you with us."

The grey dawn had come when Lord Stephen in a splendid sally led his men over the enemy's quarters, drove back the brave but exhausted

Frenchmen, and saw with elation, not untinged with shame, the enemy's flag hauled down and replaced by the flag of his own proud country.

Mauled as the *Blanche* was above, she had only eight killed, including her captain.

There were but twenty-one wounded, among them Lord Stephen himself, to whom the pain of his bleeding arm alone brought any peace.

The *Pique* had seventy-six killed and one hundred and ten wounded, the lower ranging of the British guns accounting for this.

Putting Lieutenant Frodsham in command of the prize, Lord Stephen returned to his own quarter-deck, and there came face to face with Seagrove, who saluted him in silence.

The two looked at each other awkwardly, and then the old master half sadly, half whimsically said—

"Am I to be hanged, my lord, to celebrate your first victory?"

Lord Stephen put out his uninjured left hand, and gripped Seagrove's grimed palm between his fingers—

"It's your victory, Seagrove," he said, his boyish face flushing, "and every man on board knows it!"

"Not it, sir," returned the master briskly, "for every man who saw you the other night when the gale was on, knows you're made of the right stuff—only being a bit young, you wanted nursing to win your first fight!"





PHIL MAY
1901

Little Girl.—"A POUND OF STEAK, PLEASE, AND CUT IT TOUGH, WILL YER?"

Butcher (amazed).—"WHY?"

Little Girl.—"CAUS' IF IT'S TENDER, FATHER EATS IT ALL!"

TWO MADMEN AND A MONKEY

By

J. L. LANG

I HAD been two months in practice when they came, and the manner of their coming was thus—

After graduating in Edinburgh, studying in Paris and Heidelberg, and going round the world—first as a ship's surgeon and then with a "D.T." case—I had put up my brass plate in Brook Street.

It was, perhaps, an ambitious thing for a young fellow with no capital, but a few hundreds of his own earning, to do, but everyone had instilled into my mind the doctrine that a doctor cannot have too much shop front. And I had a most excellent front,—a handsome porticoed door, wide steps, and all the rest of it.

Inside I had a small bedroom, dining-room (the smell of the mutton-chops my housekeeper daily cooked for me over a gas-stove on the landing haunts me still), and consulting-room opening out of it. The dining-room was also used as a waiting-room for patients.

That is to say, I sometimes waited there for patients while the housekeeper, Mrs. Wells, cleaned out the consulting-room.

When I first took the rooms there were two other men in the house, a dentist and an oculist, but soon after I arrived they had some dispute with the landlord and cleared out, which made it rather lonely for me.

Mrs. Wells, a respectable widow with a large

small family, arrived daily at 7.30 a.m. and stayed until 7 p.m., and during her absence I attended to my own door.

The fact was, it didn't require much attention. I was only twenty-six, you must know, and people had not begun to know me yet.

Sir Alexander M'Tulloch, the eminent specialist, was my godfather, and occasionally he sent me an odd job. But I fancy that the good old man did so merely that I might not get rusty, as the patients were mainly doctors' wives and other members of the non-paying lot.

Meantime I had a small post in one of the less well-known Children's Hospitals, did a good deal of gratis practice for an old friend who was curate in a very poor parish, and kept working away at my Thesis. So that although I was not what you could call overworked, I was not idle.

The evenings sometimes seemed abnormally long, and the house abnormally silent, when Mrs. Wells had gone home to feed her brood. There were only the echoes left in the empty house and the long passage from the front door, which the landlord had, in a moment of mistaken taste, tried to convert into a grotto by means of much cork-wood and the planting of ferns that had died long months ago.

But I had one never-failing companion and amusement,—my monkey, Diabolo. I had bought him when he was quite a little chap,

from a sailor at Colombo, and he certainly was the sharpest, as well as the ugliest, monkey I ever knew.

No bit of sin was beyond the powers of Diabolo. He was the terror of Mrs. Wells, and had to be caged up during her hours of labour, but in the evening Diabolo came out and made merry with me. He was an obedient little chap so far as I was concerned, and as affectionate as a dog.

It was exactly 7 p.m. on a dull November day when I got back from Walworth, where I had been seeing a bad case of chronic bronchitis, with phthisical complications, for my curate friend, and Mrs. Wells swiftly opened the door just as I was about to put in my latch-key. She had her old black bonnet on, and was apparently impatiently fluttering her wings for flight to the home nest.

"Two gentlemen to see you, if you please, sir," she said hastily, her anxiety to be gone not quite overbalancing her triumph; "they've been here waiting for an hour and a half, but I said I expected you in every minute, so they waited on." Her tone was one, not unnaturally, of exultation.

"In the waiting-room, I suppose?" I queried as coolly as might be—open rejoicing before Mrs. Wells would have been unseemly for a budding consultant with a practice that had as yet shown no signs of spring.

"Yes, sir,—I kep' 'em there. They seemed wishful to go to the consulting-room, but I said, 'No, the doctor allows no one to enter there in his habsence.' So I gave them the *Standard* and the book of Views of the Rocky Mountains—and there they are!"

"Are they—ah—*young* gentlemen?" I asked, with a little sudden misgiving. It would have been such a sell to go in and find two chaps

from Edinburgh, or some of the Heidelberg lot.

"Oh no, sir," said Mrs. Wells reassuringly, "they're *patients*! One is an 'ansome old gentleman with a long beard, and the other is youngish, with glasses, and looks very delicate. He 'as a merry laugh, the old one."

"Did they ask any questions?" I could not forbear inquiring.

"Just if Dr. Alexander Jamieson was at 'ome, so I says, 'No, not at this very identical moment as ever is, but I expects him in every moment as passes.' So there they are!" said Mrs. Wells, again unable to rid her tone entirely of triumphant self-congratulation—"There they are a-waiting still! May I go 'ome now, sir, or shall I stay till they're gone?"

"Thanks, Mrs. Wells," I said, "you have done admirably. You needn't trouble to wait—you are late already—I shall see them to the door myself."

As I walked along that cork grotto passage, I heard the door slam on good Mrs. Wells's heels. She was gone until 7.30 the following morning.

Are there such things as guardian angels? If so, where was mine dallying when it should have made me at that moment rush and drag my housekeeper into the house again by the skirts of her beaded dolman?

I looked at myself in one of the long glasses that broke the waste of cork wall here and there, as I walked along to the waiting-room, and was glad to see that I looked professional. My surtout fitted well, and any shabbiness about it was disguised in the evening.

I opened the waiting-room door and went in.

A tall, powerfully-built, elderly man, dressed in semi-clerical fashion, was standing just inside

the door, apparently examining with interest a collection of weapons I had picked up during my travels abroad, and which was mounted on red baize and hung on the wall.

He turned round sharply, with a charming smile, and I saw that he was a handsome man with grey hair, worn rather long, and a long grey beard.

"I am extremely sorry to have kept you waiting, sir," I said. "I was detained by a serious phthisical case—a lady whose husband is most anxious about her" (it was quite true—he was a coster), "but I shall be happy to give you my best attention now."

My patient smiled and bowed. "Don't apologise," he said cheerily, "don't apologise. You've come now. That's all that's wanted."

I looked round the room.

"I understood my servant to say you had a friend with you?" I remarked—and at that moment I heard noises coming from my consulting-room that made my question a thoroughly interested one.

"Yes, yes," said the old gentleman. "True—true, I'm just going to tell you about him. He's in there. In there—oh dear yes!" and he laughed in what seemed to me the most unaccountable manner.

"Shall we go to him?" I asked—a feeling of unease coming over me—and I went forward to the door.

"Wait a minute! wait a minute!" said the patient, in fits of uncontrollable laughter; "that's just where the joke comes in! If I were you, I'd wait a bit."

"But *why*?" I said, in dazed amazement.

"He's going to kill you, you see," he said.

"Kill me? What do you mean?"

The old man giggled still louder.

"He is mad, you see," he said at last—"quite

mad. He escaped this afternoon from Dr. Ashford-Wilmot's establishment at Purley, and he wants to kill you."

"But you were with him!" I gasped. "Why, in the name of Providence, did you allow him to escape?"

He giggled more. I could have killed the old fool.

"Oh well, well," he said, "I had reasons. You must allow a person reasons. Even the Pope of Rome has reasons sometimes."

My brain seemed to be going round.

"Is this all a joke?" I said—"an idiotic joke in infernally bad taste; or what does it mean?"

"It means what I tell you," said the old man. "We came away together. Dr. Ashford-Wilmot is a brute—an offensive, arrogant, ignorant, impious, blasphemous brute. His society became intolerable to me—his presence an insult. Do you know Dr. Ashford-Wilmot?"—he paused to ask, and there was a cunning look in his eyes.

I shook my head despairingly.

"Well, I tell you, he is a blasphemer. And this man in there—I'm sure I don't know his name—is a raging lunatic—a raging, gnashing, murderous lunatic; but I tell you this"—and, stepping nearer me, he solemnly tapped me on the arm with his forefinger—"I thought him sane when we started."

"How did you find him out?" I feebly asked. The noises inside my consulting-room continued,—vague, bumping noises of I knew not what.

"Oh, well, that was easy enough," he said; "he is a rank impostor. He says he is the Messiah, and I happen to have excellent authority for knowing that he is nothing of the sort."

I do not know what I said. I think I gave a



PAUL 72-
77

He.—"AWFULLY GENEROUS FELLOW. I BELIEVE HE WOULD GIVE THE HEAD OFF HIS SHOULDERS IF HE COULD."

She.—"WELL, I SHOULDN'T CALL *THAT* VERY GENEROUS."

low groan, but he took it for some sort of response.

"It is easy enough to prove that *that* is false," he said, with a laugh, "for, you see, I happen to be God Almighty, and I know he is no son of *mine*."

The room seemed to swim round, but with a mighty effort I pulled myself together.

The old man had very bright black eyes, and he fixed me with them. They fairly danced with amusement.

"We came by train to London Bridge," he said, "and walked up here. We both hate Dr. Ashford-Wilmot. He is a blasphemous lunatic. So we formed a plan for the destruction of the medical profession. We are going to blow up the College of Physicians, probably to-morrow or the next day. We shall use nitro-glycerine and fire from heaven. You don't happen to have any nitro-glycerine about you?"

I silently shook my head.

"So first of all I thought we might kill Sir Andrew Dark. He lives in Harley Street, I know, for I consulted him there once. But on the way we happened to pass your house, and noticed your brass plate, and I thought we might as well begin with you. So we came in and waited."

I thought of Mrs. Wells's triumph, and gave a bitter laugh.

The lunatic joined in with his silly giggle.

"A good joke, isn't it?" he said appreciatively. "By the way, I suppose you've killed plenty of people in your time, but I wonder if you have any fancy as to the way you'd like to die? . . . Of course there were all those weapons ready on the wall. He has taken one of those curly Indian knives—it was well cleaned, and seems sharp."

Here he pointed at the morocco seat of one

of my dining-room chairs. It was stabbed again and again, with unsightly, ragged cuts.

"We rummaged your consulting-room," he continued, "and found several poisons—but no nitro-glycerine. Also a rook rifle, with ammunition. He has loaded that. He says he won the Queen's Prize at Bisley."

It was like a frightful nightmare where one has not a word to say. My tongue seemed paralysed. The policeman, I knew, was not likely to be passing at that hour. The house next door was empty. I could hear the hansoms carrying people to dinner jingling up the street. The traffic in Bond Street was still loud and lively.

If I were to rush at the consulting-room door and try to barricade it, the armed lunatic would rush out and fire at me while this one attacked me from behind. It was a hopeless case. I must die. I wondered if Mrs. Wells would faint when she found me in the morning, and if I should have a notice in the *B.M.J.*

At that moment I felt quite certain that, had I lived, I should have got a gold medal for my Thesis, and ultimately have become President of the Royal College of Physicians. A baronetcy seemed to me to have been a dead certainty.

And then I heard a noise, a sound of breakage and of pattering feet. Curiously enough it seemed to me to come from some other room, *not* the consulting-room, but almost at the same moment the door of the consulting-room opened, and that armed maniac stood before me.

He was a pale, youngish man, with spectacles, as I had already been told, and a very unbecoming broken nose. He wore a long, light overcoat, the pockets of which bulged out with medicine bottles. In one hand was my rook rifle and in the other that ghastly knife.

"Here he is!" said my companion. "Here is Dr. Alexander Jamieson. We have had a pleasant talk," and he threw himself down in an arm-chair, and laughed a wheezy, giggling laugh that shook his whole frame.

I grasped the back of a chair firmly with both hands. If I had to die I should die fighting.

"Can't you listen to reason?" I cried despairingly. "For God's sake, don't fire!"

The man with the rifle was looking straight at me, and was rapidly raising the weapon to his shoulder. It was my intention to smash it to the ground with the chair as he aimed, and then struggle for my life.

But as he looked at me, with a sinister evil face, with almost all that was human long gone out of it, and nothing but murderous madness left, a sudden change came over his expression. His jaw dropped. He was looking beyond me, behind me, at the door into the passage. And from the passage came the same smashing noise I had heard before.

Surely no saving angel ever wore a more perfect disguise than the one that saved me that night.

I followed the direction of the man's eyes, and saw entering the door the form of little Diabolo. He wore, as usual, his little winter coat and trousers of red flannel. Trained along by a string behind him was a rapidly smashing empty whisky bottle, and under one arm was the handsome gilt-edged Bible I had received from my aunt Elizabeth Murray on leaving Scotland for Germany.

Diabolo's affection for me was a thing I never doubted. When he saw me, he scrambled up on to my shoulder, gibbering with joy. The bottle he left on the floor, but the Bible he carried with him, and on my shoulder he sat, playfully picking the sacred book to pieces, leaf

by leaf, and carefully casting each leaf from him as he picked it out.

The effect he had upon the two murderous lunatics was amazing. The elder man sat quite feebly staring in the arm-chair, while the younger gaped foolishly at both of us.

As for me, I stood facing them for what seemed to me an eternity, and as I gazed my wits returned to me and I formed my plan of action.

At last the younger man spoke.

"Who are you?" he asked hoarsely. "Who is he?" and he dropped the rifle to point with a shaking forefinger at Diabolo.

"I am the King of All Evil," I promptly replied. "I am Satan. Men call me the Devil. This is my familiar spirit. Speak to them, Diabolo!" And Diabolo, who knew his name well, gibbered with a loud and rapid incoherence.

The old man had ceased to laugh. He looked a very collapsed old man as he sat there.

"Then how do you happen not to have any nitro-glycerine?" he asked, with half-frightened cunning.

"I have millions and millions of tons," I said; "they are laid underneath this room. They are timed to explode in exactly ten minutes from now. They will blow you both to hell, and then it will be *my* turn to laugh."

The man with the broken nose gave a wild, hoarse cry, like an animal at bay, and ran at me with the knife in his uplifted hand, but Diabolo gave a screech of fear and tried to scramble down from my shoulder, and the lunatic stopped short, terror-struck.

And then I laughed out, loud and long, in sheer hysterical, overstrung laughter. It was a horrid exhibition, but it served a useful end.

Both men ran, tumbling over each other, along the passage, towards the street door, and

I picked up the rifle and ran too. The elder was a heavy, asthmatic old man, I noticed as he ran.

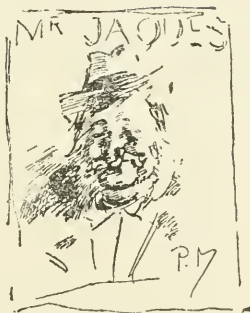
There was a little empty room at the front door where Mrs. Wells had awaited my return that evening, and its door was open. The old man looked round and saw me with the rifle, and rushed in there, shrieking. The other man followed him. Mercifully the key was there, on the outside, and I turned it.

A surgeon friend lived five doors from me, and he says that neither he nor his man will ever forget my appearance as I burst into the house that night.

But we got plenty of help, and the lunatics were secured, although they both struggled ferociously for their freedom.

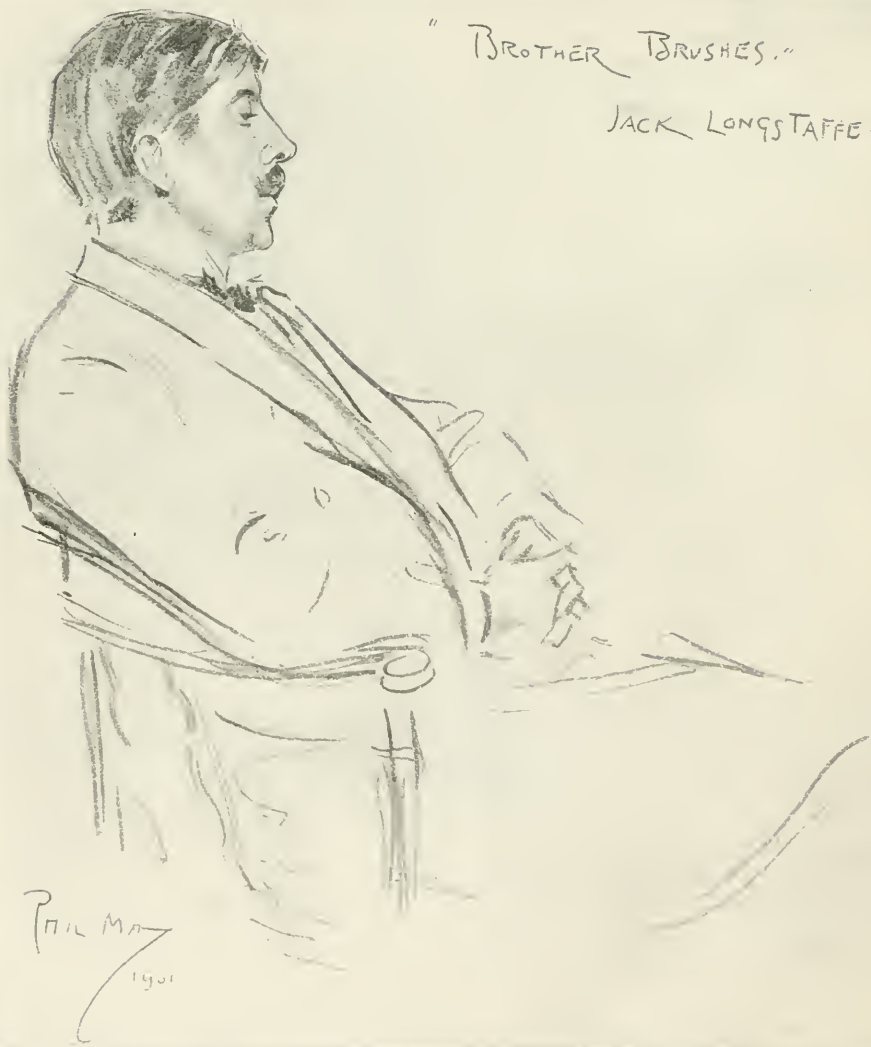
Dr. Ashford-Wilmot was very grateful to me for my services, and for my help in completely hushing up the affair, which must have seriously damaged his institution had the story of the escape leaked out.

From that day the work that came to me through him meant a steady income, so I feel I may fairly regard that lunatic pair as my first paying patients.



"BROTHER BRUSHES."

JACK LONGSTAFFE.



THE LADY OF DEATH

BY

HERBERT SHAW

LECUTIER did not like this story being written, because it is the account of a mistake he made; but the others said it should be told as a lesson.

On a spring evening they sat together in Moxham's rooms. Outside the busy night of London rolled, and there was a sudden sound of running feet and hoarse voices.

"West-End tragedy: Suicide of Viscount Frayne."

The lift man knocked at the door. When Moxham had crossed the room and pulled the door open, the man handed him a damp paper. Afterwards Lecutier took the paper from his hand and read.

"Young Frayne," said he. "It is the second death——" and he went to the window, staring out in silence, the paper still in his hand.

"Why?" said Moxham, after a long time. "You knew him then?"

"I did." Lecutier drew the curtain across the pane and turned. "Have you ever thought of the little plays which are always being acted in London, that begin and end every hour; plays which Lady London hides? Sometimes we get glimpses of them; more often they are altogether hidden."

"A pretty thought, though it has been said before," said Moxham. "But Frayne? Is it

the beginning, or the middle, or the end of one of London's plays?"

"God knows," said Lecutier, with bitterness. "Yet I expect it to be the middle—she is not likely to end *her* play so soon!"

"She?" said Moxham, after another pause. "Why don't you sit down, Lecutier? How can you tell us about it when you are so restless?"

Lecutier passed his hand over his forehead.

"I feel it rather," said he; "I knew young Frayne pretty well. Up to a short time ago I was observing him closely, and he was very interesting. Lately I have hardly seen him at all; I know now he must have been occupied . . . with other things."

"What is her name?" said Broadbridge, who had not yet spoken.

"It is a pretty name," replied Lecutier, sitting down at last. "Have you never heard of the Princess Margaret?"

"Occasionally," said Moxham. "In the society columns of the papers. But they have not enlightened me much; they are always too accurate."

"I have heard her spoken of," said Broadbridge; "and they called her the Scornful Princess."

"In a way it suits her," said Lecutier. "I have met her, and known her slightly, in

Vienna. She is more cosmopolitan than I ever hope to be."

"Margaret is a queer name for a roving princess," said Moxham. "It is too simple and too English. By rights her name should end in 'z' or 'iski.'"

"She is a queer lady," said Lecutier. "She is poor, and her name is clear and high; she is young, and has not married. But wherever she has gone she has left a trail of death behind her."

"At Monte Carlo, Osborne shot himself—on a summer night like this. He had been with her up to half an hour of his death, and they put it about that it was an accident, but I know the kind of accident it was. Now it's young Frayne. I always remember her as shadowed by Osborne's death; this makes two instead of one. And—I may be judging wrongly—I hate that woman, though no one has ever said a word against her honour."

"Honour," said Moxham, "is a vague word. I hate her too."

Lecutier turned to Broadbridge. "What name did you say you had heard her called?" said he. "The 'Scornful Princess,' wasn't it? I am going to change it. I'll call her the 'Lady of Death.'"

Not till long afterwards did Broadbridge and Moxham see her, this wandering, beautiful woman.

When the summer was dying hard, they were, all three, guests at a country-house; and they knew that she was coming there.

Rain had kept the men indoors that afternoon, and after a pretence of billiards they sat and smoked moodily, for they had planned some excursion.

Suddenly a boy of twenty came into the room. He was in great spirits, and carried

himself jauntily; his eyes were bright with a glint of excitement.

"What's the matter, Duplessis?" asked Lecutier.

"Oh, nothing"—the boy paused—"The Princess Margaret has come." And after a minute, "I've seen her," he cried, like a challenge.

The face of the Princess Margaret was cold as stone, and she never smiled; but that evening she drew all eyes. She seemed quite careless of all this.

Lecutier watched her narrowly; to him she was a splendid study. Broadbridge also watched her, as Moxham did.

All the artist in Moxham was stirred by the easy grace of her movements, the beauty of her face framed in the red-gold hair.

She was queen of all the women there; and because she was quite indifferent they could not fail but be friendly to her.

And young Duplessis watched her as well, quite differently. He did not seem to be able to take his eyes from her for a moment.

She was so different to anybody he had known in his short experience that she was a revelation of what a woman could be. He nursed already boyish dreams in which, with her, he ruled the world. But as for her, she barely noticed him.

Late that night Lecutier slipped along the corridor, and knocked at Moxham's door. It was opened by Broadbridge.

"You're here then?" said Lecutier. "The same idea as I had—to talk for a minute or two."

He shut the door. "Well," he said, "and what do you think of her?"

"She's grand," said Broadbridge. "That's

all one can say. What could not one do . . . with such a woman to help him."

Lecutier looked at him steadily. "If you are not careful, you will be having the complaint yourself," said he.

"I think not," said Broadbridge, smiling. "I have become too old. But did you notice young Duplessis?"

"I rather fancy I did," said Lecutier; "that's why I came across and wanted to talk to you. If there was ever a case in which we should fight together if we can, I think it's now. I've told you I hate the Princess Margaret; and I told you why, for I gave you all about her that I knew. I believe you agreed with me.

"There's young Duplessis, a decent chap, already head over heels. If you had gone about to-night with one eye shut you must have noticed it, for his admiring gaze never left her. And if she's going for Duplessis we ought to do our level best to prevent it."

He stopped. Moxham said, "Go on."

"It's not nice," Lecutier went on, "for three fellows to be talking about a woman in this way. If you don't agree, I wish you would pull me up at once. You have the facts the same as I have. But when I look at her I see only the dead—Osborne and Frayne."

"Very likely, of course, we can't do anything. It's a certainty if we went to Duplessis and spoke of her victims he would laugh, and be more in love than before. But if we see a chance at any time, we can use it somehow. Do you think I'm right, or not?"

"I agree perfectly," said Moxham. "Although it's not likely we shall be able to do much."

"No?" said Lecutier. "I see one chance, but I hardly like to mention it. This evening, when you were talking to someone, Moxham, she looked across the room. I have seen her a

good many times. But I have never seen her look at anyone . . . as she looked then at you."

"It's very flattering, but I decline altogether. There's Lucille, you know," said Moxham.

"Well, good-night," said Lecutier.

They heard his step along the passage till he reached his own room. In a little while they heard it again, and the door opened.

"You're quite right, you know, Moxham," he said.

The door shut behind him. So the play went on for nearly a week, without a change; Duplessis was always in attendance on her.

One moment she would be more gracious to him. The next, she was as cold as ever before. He hardly cared. To Lecutier and Moxham she spoke but seldom; so far as things permitted, they kept aloof from her.

It was quite new experience for the boy to know a beautiful woman, and to be alone in the field; no wonder that he was enthralled.

Lecutier, walking on the grass that bordered the gravelled road from the big gates about dusk one night, came upon the two together, and Harold Duplessis was pleading with her.

To go on might be to betray himself. They would still think then that he had spied upon them. If he were to do anything, it would be better to risk retracing his steps.

With an old proverb in his mind about a sheep and a lamb, he shrugged his shoulders, and—stayed.

What Duplessis was saying he did not know, but certainly he was pleading with her. The Princess Margaret said "No, No, No." He argued, without effect. Again he pleaded, it was useless still.

"Very well then," he said, and in his anger and excitement he had raised his voice, so that even to Lecutier it was now quite distinct,

"am I to think that you have only tricked me all this time?"

With all the tension on his nerves Lecutier found himself smiling at the last three words. Harold Duplessis had known her for a week.

To a boy—under some circumstances and at some times—a week is a hundred years.

—"All this time. . . ." For a long while no answer from the dark ; Lecutier held himself so tightly that he was afraid.

And then she laughed. It was an unpleasant laugh. Almost a stage laugh.

Young Duplessis, when he turned and walked away, his hands tightly clenched, passed Lecutier so closely that the latter would have touched him if he had held out his hand.

After a little while Lecutier backed carefully away. It was a difficult thing to rid himself satisfactorily of that laugh in his ears.

"I have become a spy," he said to Moxham in the house. "A low, common spy. But I have seen the third act of the play . . . and now I hate her more for a certain laugh she has."

"It is not like you to talk in that way," said Moxham.

And indeed for Lecutier such a whimsical mood was uncommon ; but he held it to the end of the day.

When all the men were together in the evening, he was laughing and grave by turns. He looked constantly at the white face of Duplessis, and presently, lowering his voice, he started on a story to which every man could put the actors.

It was the story of Osborne and Frayne and the Princess Margaret. He went uninterrupted through the tale ; no one dared to stop him ; and at the finish, in a silence like a wall, he lifted his glass on high.

"I give you a toast," he cried. "I drink to the 'Lady of Death.'"

For what followed not one there was prepared.

Through all the story young Duplessis had sat bewildered. But now he was quite sure of the purpose of the narrator ; the enlightenment broke on him like a clap of thunder. Though he knew the Princess to have played so cruelly with him, he was as loyal as ever to her at heart.

He sprang from his chair with a kind of sob, and confronted Lecutier with murder in his eyes.

The other men all were breathless, when silently the door opened upon the scene.

It was the Princess herself.

For just a second she stood in the doorway, and then,—*"I heard,"* said she ; *"I was passing, and I heard."* She looked full at Duplessis. *"I will have no quarrelling on my account, Harold,"* she cried, and she was gone.

And when Lecutier woke the next morning, a servant had slipped a note underneath his door.

"I have gone for an early morning ride. When I return at eight o'clock, I will go to the little summer-house to the left of the lodge, among the trees. I want to see you there."

He could not choose but go. He waited in the summer-house ; outside, in the clear morning, the birds were merry in the trees.

She came in suddenly and quite noiselessly, dramatic as usual, dressed in a grey riding-habit and a straw hat.

Still dramatic, she tapped her fingers on the wooden table for a moment.

"Harold Duplessis has gone," she said, and hesitated.

Silently Lecutier questioned her, and she spoke quickly.

"He went this morning. Last night you

crowned me. When he had heard the name you gave me then, I suppose he would hardly have wished to stay. That chapter is finished, and I am only curious now. Why in the world did you take such trouble . . . about me?"

"Princess," said Lecutier, speaking very gravely, "I knew Frank Osborne, and he is dead. Young Frayne is dead, and he was my friend. Harold Duplessis——"

"Leave his name alone," she cried. "If you will hold it to yourself alone I will tell you a story."

"Go on," said Lecutier.

"You knew Frank Osborne. If you knew him at all, you know the sort of man he was when I met him, so tired of everything, because he had taken everything from the world and given nothing in return. To him I was just something new—at a proposal he dared to make to me one night I struck him in the face.

"He went away; you knew his unconquerableness with women; I believe he made an end because he was so mortified and tired. I did not give it a second thought. I was glad. But wherever I went afterwards the thing followed me. I did not care."

Lecutier looked up. She said, "Before God, it is true," and went on.

"Young Frayne—I liked him very much. It was reported that he shot himself in the afternoon. That was not true. It was in the morning. Half an hour afterwards his father came to see me.

"My son is dead in the house," he said, and he was still shaking like a child. And he told me that this son had committed a forgery for a big amount, and the rumour of the forgery had been about the clubs.

"He was a very long time telling me, but he wanted my permission for him to couple my name with his son's name, so that people should

think I had been the cause of his death. He thought the rumour of his son's crime would then pass away—as it did.

"What did it matter to me, after all? Only the discredit of my name instead of his son's . . . and I consented. He went back and announced his son's death."

"Oh," cried Lecutier, "if I had known."

"Don't speak yet," said she. "You men judge a woman always because you do not know. And the other night Harold Duplessis asked me to marry him. I would not, because I knew that in time he would be certain to hear of the deaths of those two, and the association of my name, and . . . and I feared he would not be strong enough not to doubt me.

"So I sent him away. I laughed at him . . . and he went away. Last night he did hear. But before that I sent him away. I knew, of course, all the time that you were fighting against me. What do you think of your fighting now?"

At the mention of Duplessis her eyes had been wet with tears, but now she looked bravely across the table.

"Princess," said Lecutier, "God forgive me for all I have done, for I do not dare to ask you. If I can give you help in anything——"

Her arms were folded on the wooden table, and she was crying half silently, her head resting on her arms. The sunlight danced on her glorious hair.

"I wish you would go away," she cried. "Do you think Harold will come back now?"

.

Lecutier wired for Duplessis, and he came back that very morning, and before night all knew that the Princess and he were engaged.

"Thank God, the end of the story is right after all," said Lecutier to Moxham.

"What do you mean?" replied Moxham. "I he praised her to the skies. And though was thinking very differently."

But Lecutier was bound by his promise; they were amazed, they knew he must have had good reason so to change his though to both Broadbridge and Moxham mind.





PHIL M.A.

1901

"WHERE'S YER FATHER, BILLY?"

"E'S DOIN' FOURTEEN DAYS."

"WOT FOR?"

"BEIN' DRUNK AND USIN' PROFOUND LANGUAGE."

MYSTERY OF THE CAFÉ LONDON

By

HAL ASHWORTH

JUST after midnight, and an icy, wet evening.

The sweeping, sleety rain, which had been falling for several hours, was taking a temporary nap, while overhead the heavy clouds, looming up in black battalions, foretold another onslaught in force.

Piccadilly Circus for once was almost deserted. Its wooden blocks and flagstones shining like polished ebonite, on which the bluish electric and yellowish gas lights cast shivering reflections as if affected by the bleakness of the night.

Up one of the six thoroughfares leading from the Circus a woman tastefully and quietly attired walked with a firm easiness and distinctive grace of bearing. Certainly tall and of distinguished appearance. Though her veil was a faithful custodian of her features, yet no cursory passer-by would have been hasty in setting her down as one of the usual *habituées* of the vicinity. There was, however, no cursory passer-by nor anyone else in the street as the lady approached the less public entrance of the Café London. The prospect of warmth and brightness inside evidently made the outside coldness come home to her, for her hands embedded themselves more deeply into her rich muff.

Certainly there was a pocket in the muff, and

what it had contained was now in my lady's gloved right hand, firmly held.

It will save confusion if we ignore fur, kid, and white flesh, and have a good look at the object.

A watch-shaped purse, silver-circled, with morocco inserts at sides bearing a monogram? No, not a purse, for a shining tube three-quarters of an inch long juts out on the edge where the clasp might be, and on the opposite side where the hinge might be is more shining metal in the form of a curved strip, not unlike the lever of a 'bus conductor's ticket-punch.

Look inside; neither gold nor silver, merely copper and lead. The last, thick, conical, and snub-nosed, fitting into a small closed copper cylinder. There are just four of these, lying in four grooves of a disc of solid steel. A steel wheel, in fact, with four spokes of half copper and half lead radiating from its hub, but the leaden end of one spoke looks directly through the dwarf tube.

You know what it is now. The neatest and most deadly of weapons—the hand-palm revolver. Lies hidden completely in an ordinary-sized hand. The muzzle appearing between the second and third fingers as merely a metal ring of threepenny-piece diameter. Against the ball of the thumb comes the lever-trigger. Compress the hand, the hidden striker hits the copper and

death goes through the tube. Sometimes the latter protrudes a little more, then the weapon, when emptied, becomes a highly effective "knuckle-duster." Yes, a very useful traveling *vade mecum* on the Continental Express. Ask a Bond Street gunsmith to show you one some day. They are not common, neither are they rarities.

The holder of this strange "purse" does not feel the sting of the night air, there is no faltering in foot or face, but her heart is pumping hot blood to her very toe and finger tips.

No fear of her taking a chill, so we shall unchivalrously permit her to wait outside while we review the Café's immediate interior.

The Café London had at that time, and in fact still has, a reputation far outside Europe for its edible and drinkable table-furnishings. Its cellars concealed wines and liqueurs that would placate the most fastidious palate. While the princely salary of its *chef* entailed a cuisine that only the most bilious of epicures could have fretted at.

Undoubtedly the bills were a trifle heavy, and anent these a feeble humorist once remarked that had The Light Brigade charged but so thoroughly and well the Russians would have been relieved not only of their guns but of their last under-garments. Occasionally, however, the otherwise business-like management charged into the valley of debt, and so it was in the case of the aforesaid humorist, whose smash and disappearance necessitated a ledger entry of a score of pounds being transferred to the "morgue" column.

The Café was the beloved resort of the superior cosmopolitan, while its dining-halls and suites received the élite of the West End—with two capitals. Here the Parisian

temporarily forgot the dreariness of Fogtown and sipped his absinthe, the Russian found some close approach to his own particular liqueur, Japanese cultivated a taste for English drinks, and Turks, Hindoos, Armenians, Germans, Americans, and others, whiled the time away in tobacco smoke and divers liquids.

The marble tables are only half-occupied as the lady, whose approach has synchronised with the foregoing description, steps into the portico.

She has drawn her left hand out of the muff, within which her right hand, holding the "purse," remains. At her look of inquiry the stalwart, soldierly commissioner, great-coated, advances a step.

The muff is raised in a line with his left breast, the lady's lips move under her veil as if to ask a question, when with a start of recognition the man's head jerks upright. As he does there is a sharp and slightly muffled crack, his legs crumple under him, and he sinks against the wall and on to the marble tiles, shot through the heart and stone dead.

In more than rehearsed terror the murderess rushes, screaming, through the two sets of swing-doors and into the startled Café, shrieking, "He shot him! He shot him!" until she is forced on to a plush lounge and begged by a few who had kept their heads to calm herself and tell what she had seen.

Confusion reigned rampant. Police, waiters, and visitors were in a jumbled heap of groups, above which rose an excited Babel of many languages. The dead commissioner was half-carried, half-dragged, into the hall, and laid on two marble tables, while a few old customers with drink-shattered nerves rapidly slunk out of the main entrance in order that the blood-dripping, gruesome sight should not be re-

corded on their memories to haunt their fitful slumbers.

While the ordinary decorous quietude of the Café was thus being upset, the lady, who had been recognised as "Mrs. Thorneycroft," a fairly frequent and always valuable visitor to the dining or lounge rooms of the establishment, was meanwhile thoroughly well acting her part.

In fact she a trifle overacted it, and thus committed one irreparable blunder. For her well-sustained and lifelike representation of a shrieking, hysterical, and terror-stricken frail female, she had intended should be followed by an imitation faint.

She anticipated removal to a more private apartment, a more or less delicately-graded recovery, perhaps the intrusion of a physician, which she would resent, and undoubtedly a considerably brief interview with an officer of the Law.

To the latter she would give an address—which would not find her next day—and make a statement, plentifully interlarded with emotional breakdowns, of hearing the pistol report, and seeing a man rush by her as she stepped into the portico.

Then she would be assisted to a cab, and drive home. Afterwards — well next day's inquest and the world that had known her might wait or look for Mrs. Thorneycroft, but in the secret recesses of some other big city she would hide, and gloat over the sweetness of her long-awaited-for revenge.

All had been arranged with systematic and fiendish cunning when commonplace physical nature took a hand.

An accurate imitation of severe hysteria is undoubtedly exhausting, but when it had to be

followed by a realistic fainting-fit, strange to say Mrs. Thorneycroft found the latter singularly easy. So easy, in fact, that she sunk into deep oblivion in one swoop. For human nature had shirked the strain, and in a genuine dead faint she was carried into an inner room.

The schemer had forgotten that though her glass gave the lie to her birth-certificate, Youth was no longer hers, and continental night-life is not the best investment for nervous and bodily strength.

Of course everyone around her assisted to bear her helpless form forth. It was Carl, the new waiter, whose lynx eye detected the lady's muff beneath the lounge seat she had reclined on.

Throughout the false demonstration of distress her right hand, thrown over the seat-back, had firmly held on to the damning repository of her guilt. But the genuine collapse relaxed nerveless fingers, and the hangman's noose fairly quivered over Mrs. Thorneycroft's head.

To pick up the sable cylinder and follow the self-appointed "first aid" party was Carl's intention. None noticed him as he left the hall.

Carl had not hurriedly disappeared from at least two European capitals owing to rigidity of rectitude—and the muff weighed uncommonly heavy.

With wits keen as needle-points sharpened by lightning, to think was to do. A chain purse and *something else* were in Carl's hip-pocket, and the muff again where it had fallen.

Once more none noticed him — for Mrs. Thorneycroft's luck had turned again.

Closing time had passed, the police ambulance had borne the corpse to an adjacent mortuary, the Chief Inspector of Vine Street Division was entering voluminous details in his notebook,



*Bailiff (who has been very well treated and settled with). — "WELL, GOOD-BYE, SIR.
SEE YOU AGAIN SOON, SIR, I 'OPE!"*

Mrs. Thorneycroft was slowly returning to consciousness under medical hands, when Carl, having hurriedly finished his duties, slipped into his overcoat and stepped briskly out into the night for his home over Westminster Bridge.

The startling occurrence of the evening had had but the slightest effect on his nerves, toughened or deadened by a varied career in which deeds of violence had not been altogether absent, and theft had been a mere matter of prudence or opportunity.

It was, however, unfortunate that he was too seasoned a rogue to attempt the inspection of his hip-pocket's contents—most unfortunate for Carl, as it turned out.

But Mrs. Thorneycroft's luck was working hard for her, and the ill-fated waiter swung off the Westminster Bridge Road up a side-street that at this particular hour suggested the garrotter or the "sandbagger."

But Carl, to whom Montmartre was a Child's First Alphabet, Vienna's slums—there are some—and Berlin's backways as Regent Street at midday, smiled at the risks he took.

A tough and eel-like acrobat, a hard and clever boxer, with a genuine aptitude for a street rough-and-tumble, and, finally, a master of the *savate*, he nevertheless was always ready on his homeward journey for the rush of the lurking assailant.

It was just as well, but it would have been better had he known of the revolver-knuckle-duster in his pocket.

Like silent, slinking wolves the four Hooligans came out of a dark court, and a heavy fist swung a cruel blow at the waiter's jaw. With a rapidity worthy of Jem Mace in his prime, Carl's head canted to his left shoulder and his

hard-knuckled right hand countered with a dull crack on the rough's "point."

He went down as if pole-axed, and no "ten seconds" could have brought him on his feet again.

Savage at losing their burly leader, the three Hooligans dashed, but warily, at their prey, as he, with marvellous quickness and agility, danced into the middle of the narrow roadway. Two approached him on either side, while the third hung back a little and seemed to be employed in hitching up his trousers. He was more of a sneak-thief than a footpad, and had the usual cruel heart of the cur.

Carl was smiling confidently as the two approached with much qualitative curse and epithet. He scorned either to call for aid or to sprint for safety. If he had a virtue it was ever-ready grit. Besides, these were lambs (he thought) compared to the *apachés* or *bravos*.

Like lightning he spun on his left foot, turning his back to the rough on his right, who sprang forward to receive a mule-like kick fair in the chest, while simultaneously his comrade "collected" a smashing blow that altered forever his nose's contour.

The French *savate* and English boxing are an irresistible combination in the feet and hands of an expert.

As the "kicked" and the "struck" successively fell, or staggered back temporarily blinded, the Cur played his part, and with a whish his broad leather waist-belt, with its sharp-edged, murderous brass buckle, cut through the air, and overlapped with cruel force round Carl's head. A sharp jerk, and down with a crash came the plucky, but unfortunate, man, never to get up again.

The infuriated recipient of the blow on the

nose took a running kick at the prostrate head, then it was "belts," and merciful unconsciousness intervened.

Cries for "Police!" from surrounding windows hastened the murderous gang's operations. The sneak-thief was "through" the victim thoroughly in a few seconds, the leader, half-dazed, was dragged to his feet, and as the official bull's-eye lantern came calmly along to answer a call that was almost of nightly occurrence in that unsavoury quarter, the four stealthily retired up a blind court, where only a possé of police dare follow them at that hour, even if their exact retreat were known.

The police whistle shrilled over Carl as he lay like a log, blood-bathed, battered, and stertorously breathing.

A half an hour later the house-surgeon of St. Thomas' diagnosed four separate fractures of the skull, pronounced the case as serious, and sent for an eminent visiting surgeon of the hospital, as he knew trephining must be performed.

Meanwhile, on a dirty blanket, in a half underground hovel, the cowardly four forgot their bruises as the "haul" was spread out before them.

A gold-chain purse holding two five-pound notes, seven sovereigns, and a few shillings in silver. A peculiar article with a monogram on it, in fooling with which the sneak-thief nearly shot himself and saved the ratepayer the expense of his maintenance during fifteen years penal servitude. A pound's worth of loose silver,—the waiter's "change,"—a pile of coppers, and some letters in a foreign language concluded a very satisfactory "take," even worth a murder.

Flushed by his big share in the brutal outrage,

the Cur demanded more than his usual share in the gang's plunder, and it was only after being threatened with a "stoush" in the "snitcher" by the aching-jawed leader that he was appeased with a "special award" of the "peculiar article" which his shrewder mates considered to be of a likely incriminating nature.

No surgical operation could save Carl. His splendid constitution kept him alive for four days after the cylindrical saw had cut out the skull's fracture centres.

No intelligible word, no glimmer of reason ever came to repay the nurses' ceaseless watch, and to put the police on the trail of his murderers, who spelled out in a half-penny evening paper, with some relief and some apprehension, the news of their victim's death and burial.

But it broke up the gang. With the cunning of the low criminal each recognised that they were safer away from the other. A drunken quarrel, threats and disclosures made in anger, a jealous female associate, and the grip of the Law would be on them.

So they split up, and the sneak-thief betook himself to railway platforms where anybody's luggage was his; to big crowds where his long fingers were useful; or to unwatched hotel entrances and a hasty run through unoccupied bedrooms.

He had had enough of violence; and hanging, fortunately, is still the British penalty for murder. For defence against his more powerful kind, however, he treasured the revolver-knuckle-duster.

The inquest on Sergeant-Major West, formerly of the Breconshire Regiment, and late a commissionaire at the Café London, finally ended in a verdict of Wilful Murder against some person or persons unknown.

A nervous and physical wreck,—which was

considerately attributed to the shocking strain she had undergone,—Mrs. Thorneycroft gave her evidence.

There was a tacit acquiescence all round as to what her exact calling was, but she had evidently once been a lady, and it did not concern that court that their French equivalents would have insisted on the witness displaying her professional licence, or more satisfactory details of her past and present history.

When she had returned to her senses the loss of her muff had paralysed her with terror. Her guilt, she felt, must already be known, and arrest only waited on her recovery.

When a cab was brought, and a constable detailed to escort her home, she went in a stupor, not daring to ask for her missing property.

The same officer brought her to the coroner's court next day, and while waiting to give her evidence the muff was brought to her by the Café manager.

Mechanically she took it and put her hands inside. *It was empty!*—and from that moment on the sickening dread of discovery clung like a congealed film round her heart, and never left her by night or by day.

The “murderous outrage by Hooligans” in the daily Press soon led to the identification of the dying Carl, but he was not considered for an instant to have the least association with the Café crime, and Mrs. Thorneycroft sealed lips on the loss of her purse and—the other thing.

Advised by the police that in case of an arrest her evidence would be necessary, she waited but a few days to disappear from her address. But as she was never wanted until it was too late it really didn't matter.

The public sensation had been, for London, almost tremendous. The location of the crime,

its audacity, and its extraordinary mystery served to mark it as one of the murders of the century.

West, also, was a man whose reputation both in and out of the army had been unblemished. He had gained three medals on active service, still enjoyed the esteem of his old commanding officers, and had also won the good opinion of the Café London's best clientèle. It could hardly be imagined that the dead man had had an enemy, for his honest, good-natured, soldierly demeanour made him friends on all sides.

Influence and money caused the best human sleuth-hounds to be put on the clueless trail of the murderer, but it was the “greenness” of Scotland Yard's youngest detective that contributed most to the unravelling of the mystery. But that was much later, when London, which cannot constitutionally think very long of any one thing, had ceased to talk of the Café Mystery.

Captain the Hon. A. C. Murray brought a wife back with him when he completed his two years' tour of the world. She was certainly a superb creature. Large dark eyes, raven-tressed, rich red lips, shapely bust, and a classical figure.

She was also a score younger than the Captain's forty-five years. Was said to be of English parentage born abroad, and undoubtedly did not care the proverbial “Continental” farthing for the opinions, sneers, or criticism of anything or anybody.

Her husband honoured and idolised her. Every comfort was hers that ten thousand a year can ensure, and she, in return, was “as false as hell.”

Before marriage there *had been* Sidney Hilyard, the cultured and educated gambler



Overheard on a Cab Rank.

"'AVE YER SEEN ANYTHING OF WHATYERCALLIM?"

"WHO? D'YE MEAN WHATSISNAME?"

"O NO, NOT 'IM—THAT ERE TOTHER."

"O, AH—I SEED 'IM FAST ENOUGH!"

and—blackleg. Barred in every decent club, and warned off two Atlantic liners for unnatural skill at Poker. After marriage there still *was* Hilyard, only more so.

A “clean,” capable, straightforward soldier, officer, and gentleman—nearly a perfect combination—was the Captain. Just a trifle too staid and “solid” for the lighter side of life, and, as a privileged companion put it once, “you’re a bit too deadly in earnest, old chap. Relax your ‘tension’ and frivol once a month. It’ll do you good.”

His meeting with and marrying of Lydia Airecourt did brighten him up outwardly much, and inwardly “some,” for her genuine delight in the pleasure his income placed at her call dashed an “angostura” colouring over scenes and resorts that had formerly appeared to him uninteresting and drab. Tender consideration, courtly attention, and untiring affection were Lydia’s, and it is a pity that such estimable qualities should sometimes be merely so much petrol for the “devil’s fires.” They were with his wife; and Hilyard’s unfailing selfishness, parsimonious compliments, and, occasionally, dominant curtness came positively as a refreshing relief sometimes.

From the first week she had robbed her husband. Every cheque he gave her during the brief twelve months their marriage life existed passed under the exceedingly clever penmanship of Sidney Hilyard, and thereby was much increased in value, though the trusting husband’s bank account suffered in a like inverse ratio.

Hilyard “kicked” first, strangely. He had made things so hot for himself in a few months of London that respectable club doors shut automatically against him, and any decent set dropped him like sand-ballast from a balloon.

For Hilyard was of the “thickest” and the “swiftest.”

The time came for an “opportune disappearance.” Of course Lydia was going with him. London life was dull after the less restrained and kaleidoscopic varieties of the continental cities and watering-places in which she had spent most of her existence. Now it was a mere matter of “one last healthy help at the old boy’s cash” (to quote Hilyard), and over the Channel.

The faithless wife had never hated anyone or anything in her life hitherto. She had felt she never could, but nevertheless the time came when she plunged into a hate the bitter-sweetness of which permeated her body and soul, and never left her while life existed. And that hate was directed against her husband’s soldier-servant, his master’s trusted man, and the friend of everybody but—“my lady.”

How the aversion had first been planted within her she never knew and never bothered to know. It had grown from apparently nothing to some gigantic tropical creeper that entwined her very being. Perhaps the key lay in this: The wife and lady—an educated and wanton woman of all cities; the servant and private soldier—an honest and God-fearing Englishman.

The date of flight approached. It was to be the eve of the wedding anniversary, and the wife was to be the recipient of a £2000 cheque in order to buy a necklace on which her heart was set—so she said—as her husband’s commemorative gift. The rest was easy.

Hilyard’s “gifted” pen would make this £20,000, the Captain would be away for a few days to return and keep up—ye gods!—the joyful anniversary, and the two thieves—and

worse — would have a good start towards Paris.

Lydia asked her husband to drive with her to the Bank, *en route* to his estates in the North. She was sweeter than ever to him on the way, though inwardly strung up, for the *grand coup* was now being played for.

It was early morning, and as they approached the counter the wife gave her husband the cheque to present. It was folded, and the Captain passed it to the "teller," at the same time greeting the manager, who was present: "I'm giving my wife something as a memento of a year's happiness," he said joyfully. Then to his wife, "Good-bye, love"; and Lydia kissed him in front of clerks and customers and pushed him gently towards the door with, "You mustn't miss your train."

Fifteen minutes later she left in her brougham with twenty one - thousand - pound Bank of England notes in return for the cheque her husband had himself handed to the "teller." An hour later she was Paris-bound, where Hilyard was to meet her and the notes were to be cashed.

The Captain's servant—West, his name—was attracted considerably by his mistress's French maid. It was late in the afternoon, and the maid was hurrying to get certain things together preparatory to following her mistress, with whom she had been for years associated—there were no secrets between them. West, in the absence of master and mistress, was attempting a clumsy flirtation. They were near their mistress's suite of rooms, the maid dissembling but inwardly furious. At last, losing her temper and calling him in French several qualities of "pig," as West mockingly retreated down the main staircase she seized the first thing handy of the articles

she was preparing to pack and hurled it viciously at her tormentor.

Of course it missed him, went down the staircase, and fell with a bang on the marble tiles. It was a silver casket. The impact burst it open simultaneously with the opening of the house-door and the unexpected entry of the master—to meet the tragedy of his life.

He picked up the casket and—a cheque-book. Surely his own, the writing was unmistakable. No, his was in his pocket. His mind blurred temporarily as he entered the study and sat down, took his cheque-book from his pocket, and compared it with his find.

In an hour his married life was ended, his heart shrivelled like an acrid kernel, and every fond hope and proud aspiration were for ever blasted.

The two cheque-books were copies of each other, numbered alike, and every cheque he had given his wife was correspondingly represented in the butt of the other, where the amount entered was always much larger, even down to the £20,000 of that morning.

A telephone to the Bank, and twenty minutes alone with his wife's maid, and all was over. The maddened anger of the outraged man terrified the *whole* story from the wretched servant. She was to have met her mistress at Calais. "Leave this house within twenty minutes"—and the maid went.

The Bank did its work well, and within but a brief time the numbers of the stopped notes were all over Europe. As for the man and the woman, they no longer *existed* for Captain the Honourable A. C. Murray.

Mistress and maid met and journeyed to Paris. Sidney Hilyard joined them there, and in the privacy of the lady's rooms received with

delight the beautiful crisp pile of notes. *Then* he heard the story the maid had told. Grimly to the end he listened, then rising, picked up his hat: "Those notes are now wastepaper to you or to me. I have no desire for penal servitude. Lydia, I'm leaving Paris to-night. Good-bye."

So he left her, and they never met again. If she had ever had any deep affection for him it but turned into more hate towards West, the unintentional means by which the culmination of their plans had been upset. Her career in the Continent's centres matters little. It was merely all that a man of the world would anticipate.

All this and more the aforesaid "green" detective of Scotland Yard learned after many days and nights. The "Café London Mystery" had been the first big case he was associated with, and when his Chief, after long months went by, practically gave it up in disgust for more laurel-bringing tracings, Whitton still hung in his spare time on the trail.

With a commendable prescience, or raw amateur crudeness—as you like—he wanted to know more of the woman and the waiter. The latter was dead, and the woman had disappeared, leaving no trace, so he pursued her—alongside his other daily work—relentlessly and resultlessly.

His "greenness" at last attained success, for he was so hopelessly "spoofed," "got at," "done down," etc., by the Cur—he of the Belt Gang—that the latter never ceased chuckling over it for years of his penal servitude. He stopped chuckling later, however, when near his end in the prison hospital with "galloping consumption" and sent for Detective Whitton.

The plea of "important disclosures" brought the "green" man when a more seasoned hand would have ignored the bait and jibbed at the journey.

The dying convict gasped out his story. Euston Station—Whitton on the watch for luggage thieves—a sick and feeble-looking young man apparently faints against him. Detective's heart touched, stands the invalid brandy, etc. That night Lord Bradborough left Euston by the Scottish Express, but his family jewels, to the value of £10,000, missed the train and went to Amsterdam to be "broken up."

"That—was—me," jerked out the Cur. "After you left I soon came round, though I had had a nasty twist of the same thing that's now killing me."

Whitton looked as sick as the convict. This was the "important disclosures." Then the dying man relented, and he mentioned a "queer revolver" and other things, and died.

Hotter than ever on the trail: West, servant to the Captain, killed fighting one of England's mosquito foes,—Lydia Airecourt,—the monogram on the weird pistol,—came bit by bit, until finally only the woman in being was needed to complete a superb feat of detective skill.

He found her in Paris, while pursuing Bank of England note forgers. A derelict English doctor, whose malpractices had exiled him, got Whitton's ear. An Englishwoman dying in the Montparnasse Arrondissement. Yes, he'd go and see her.

It was a dishevelled, poverty-stricken apartment he entered after weary flights of stairs.

A haggard human wreck lay asleep,—it was the last fatal doze really,—and the once more

rebuffed detective gave vent to his disappointment aloud: "That's not the woman I saw at West's inquest, for certain."

The gaunt length and death's-head struggled violently (if that can be imagined) to rise, the disgraced doctor lent aid—"West—West," came a child's unnatural shriek, "Revenge—

revenge at last. You knew—I killed you. West——"

A wild blurring of half-French, half-English curses, with an ominous rattle as a background, then a silence so sudden that it *hurt*, and the doctor let slip to the pillow the débris of the beautiful Lydia Airecourt.





Phil May
1901

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